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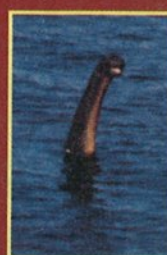




the world of strange phenomena

SPECIAL 200TH ISSUE

THE FORTEAN TIMES GUIDE TO THE WEIRD UK



strange days

Crucified nun dies, NASA sued over comet crash, cunning canines, numerical prodigies, fruity transformations, keeping a weather eye on witches and on the string section, rescued by lions, political sorcery – and much more.

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Charles Fort said he would only consider joining a forteen organisation if it wasn't named after him. **DOUG SKINNER** traces the early days, the dissent and the heresies of the Fortean Society through its eccentric and iconoclastic founder, actor and author Tiffany Thayer.

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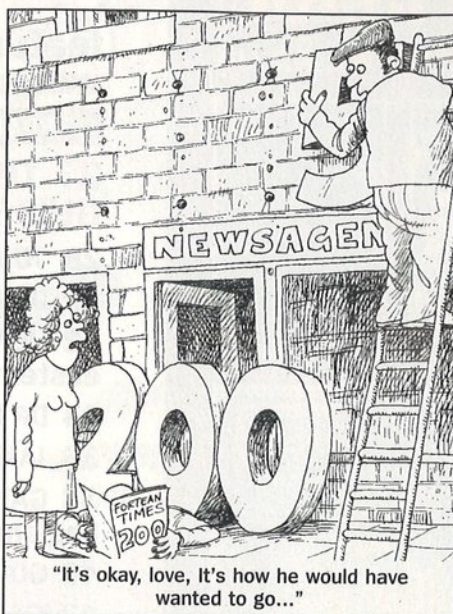
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editorial

The virtues of doubt



MARTIN ROSS

As we go to press, London is recovering from the unprecedented, if long expected, terrorist attack of 7 July, in which suicide bombers targeted the city in which we spend much of our time working on this very magazine. We're thankful that no one connected with *FT* was injured, but we're all too aware that others on their way to work that day were not so lucky, and that life in the capital – and the rest of Britain, as a major scare in Birmingham soon demonstrated – will be changed by these horrific events.

At a time like this, celebrating our 200th issue seems less important than it did just a couple of weeks ago. But on reflection, *FT* seems to us – in its own small way – a perfectly valid antidote to the steely certainties and carved-in-stone credos of those who find it so very hard to tolerate difference and dissent and so very easy to pass judgement on the lives and values of others. Doubt can be as hard a road as passionate conviction – and can just as easily stiffen into mere reflex, as Doug Skinner's profile of early fortan Tiffany Thayer perhaps demonstrates (see 'Doubting Tiffany', p48) – but we hope that *Fortean Times* will remain a safe port in an increasingly stormy sea of competing and conflicting beliefs, and a place where all are welcome to engage in good-humoured and open debate.

We've decided to celebrate this landmark with a special issue containing something a bit different, and hope you'll enjoy our *Fortean Times* Guide to Weird Britain; we asked *FT* regulars from up and down the country to nominate their favourite strange spots – from haunted castles to monster-infested

lakes – and here present the results. What is revealed, it strikes us, is a country so widely varied in its weirdness and unbounded in its oddities that it serves as a living refutation of the kinds of one-dimensional 'truth' espoused by fundamentalists of whatever stripe.

Long may our anomalies flourish! We're already looking forward to issue 300.

FORTAN TIMES ON CD-ROM

One of the inevitable consequences of *FT*'s longevity has been the attendant problem of keeping track of a vast – and ever-growing – archive of back issues. Even the collective memories of the whole team have proved no match for such a task (on occasion, we've been known to run the same news item twice!).

Now, we're pleased to be able to announce the launch of a series of *Fortean Times* Archive CD-ROMs, with each volume offering a whole year's worth of *FT* on a handy disc in pdf format. As well as providing an excellent (and space saving) way of housing a complete collection of back issues, these archive CDs are fully searchable – which means you can quickly find every reference to 'UFOS' or 'ABCs' in a year's worth of issues, making them an invaluable reference tool for fortan researchers. This

series will be an ongoing project, and we hope eventually to make every issue of *FT* available in this form, along with a full index.

You can buy the first two volumes – 2003 and 2004 – as of this issue, and make a substantial saving by purchasing both at the same time. Turn to p54 for full details.

UNCON 2006

Following difficulties in finding a venue for UnConvention in 2005, resulting in a year's hiatus, we're pleased to announce that UnCon 2006 will be taking place over the weekend of 29/30 April 2006 at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ. Put the date in your diary and keep an eye out for further announcements in these pages in coming months.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING



COVER ARTWORK
JONATHAN BURTON

Why fortan?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 67



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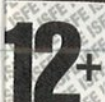
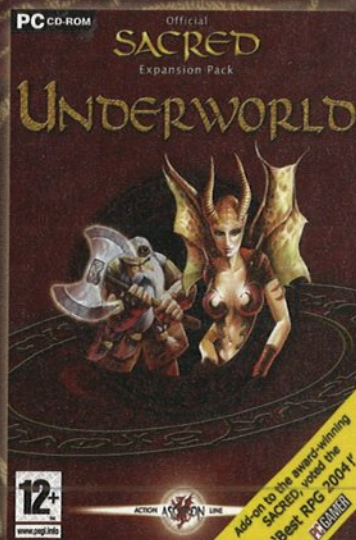
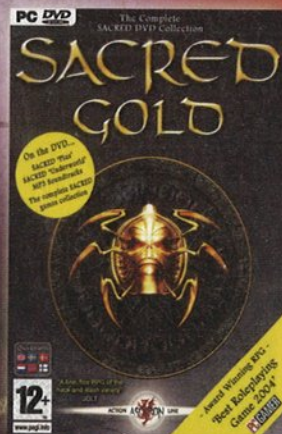
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Deadly crufixion ritual

Exorcism has tragic consequences for "possessed" Orthodox nun in Romania



CRUEL FATE: Sister Maricica Cornici's body awaiting the funeral mass.

Corogeanu said Cornici was possessed and had to be restrained because she was violent and had refused to drink holy water. "You can't take the devil out of people with pills," he said in a televised interview. On 18 June, he celebrated a funeral mass for the dead woman in the presence of 13 nuns who showed no visible emotion. Claps of thunder from an approaching storm were sometimes the only sounds to break the silence. "This storm is proof that the will of God has been done," he said. "God has performed a miracle for her, finally Irina is delivered from evil."

Since the fall of the communist regime in December 1989, the Orthodox Church, which represents 85 per cent of Romania's 22 million inhabitants, is rated in many opinion polls as the most trusted institution in the country. The number of monasteries has nearly tripled to 600 since 1990, and the number of monks has quadrupled to 2,800.

A decade ago, Corogeanu was a soccer player in Vaslui. After failing to get into university in Bucharest to study sports or law, he enrolled in religious studies at the theology department at the university in Iasi in the country's impoverished northeast. Within a year, a businessman from his hometown recruited him to help build a small monastery in the hills nearby, which was completed in 2001. The local bishop ordained him, despite his lack of experience, on the expectation that he would continue his studies part-time. However, he soon stopped in order to devote himself to running the monastery.

Maricica Irina Cornici was born in the Romanian village of Perieni and raised in an orphanage in Arad in the west of the country until the age of 19, when she travelled to Germany to work as a nanny for a family of German doctors. In January 2005, at the age of 23, she moved into a monastery in Tanacu after visiting a friend who was a nun there. Tanacu is a village in northeast Romania, an isolated community of about 1,000 people without running water or electricity, in a hilly area cultivated with vineyards and corn.

A few weeks later, Cornici started giggling during Mass, and in April she was admitted to a

Maricica thought the devil was talking to her

psychiatric hospital in the nearby city of Vaslui. "She thought the devil was talking to her and told her that she was a sinful person," said Dr Gheorghe Silvestrovici, a psychiatrist who treated her. "It's a symptom of schizophrenia, and she was probably having her first

episode." She was given medication and released on 20 April to the care of the monastery.

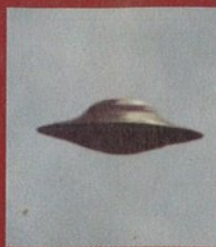
Cornici was supposed to return to hospital after 10 days, but never showed up. When her odd behaviour returned a few weeks later, Daniel Petru Corogeanu, the 29-year-old monk who ran the monastery, attempted an exorcism. Assisted by four nuns, he bound the disturbed young woman hand and foot to a makeshift cross, gagged her with a towel and left her in a dank room for three days without food – where she died of dehydration, exhaustion and suffocation. Her body was found on 15 June after fellow nuns called an ambulance.



SLASHING PUMPKINS

Balkan warning that watermelons can turn into vampires

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FORCED TO BELIEVE

Our innermost thoughts may be preset by our nature

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ARTIST OFF HIS TROLLEY

Banksy's latest pranks fool art museums in Britain and USA

PAGE 22

The Church now concedes that such laxity has led to irregularities and plans to impose stricter rules for entering monasteries, including psychological tests.

By 2003, Corogeanu had clashed with the diocese, where the leaders were disturbed by his unconventional style. When the aging bishop read him the church canon, he dismissed the rules as "freemasonry" and "19th-century innovations". The monastery's original community of monks broke up as the men left to become priests and Corogeanu began taking in nuns, who were completely devoted to him. He let

his hair grow until it reached well down his back and his reddish-brown beard grew over his chest. His services, held several times a day and in the middle of the night, attracted a fanatical following from nearby villages. He also developed a flair for casting out demons.

The Orthodox Church has now closed down Tanacu monastery, and strongly condemned Cornici's exorcism ritual as "abominable". It has defrocked Corogeanu and excluded the four nuns from the church. On 22 June, all five were charged with aggravated murder. If found guilty, they could face up to 25 years in prison. As their

intention was 'cure' rather than punishment, some maintain that the lesser charge of manslaughter would have been more appropriate. Corogeanu still has strong support in Tanacu, where many people contend that Cornici was indeed possessed. A 34-year-old parishioner, who had come to defend Corogeanu and gave her name as Dora, said "Sister Irina had to be punished. She had an argument with the Father during a Sunday mass and insulted him in front of the congregation." [AFP] 18 June; BBC News, 18+20 June; [AP] 24 June; NYTimes, via Int. Herald Tribune, 4 July 2005.

ASTROLOGER SUES NASA

On 4 July 2005, an 820lb (372kg) copper impactor measuring 3ft by 3ft (90cm by 90cm) smashed into the surface of comet Tempel 1's nucleus at 23,000mph (37,000km/h), throwing up a huge plume of icy debris. Impact occurred just after 5.50GMT at a distance of about 83 million miles (133 million km) from Earth. The probe's mothership, the Deep Impact spacecraft launched last January, watched from a safe distance, sending images back to Earth. The collision is expected to create a crater that could be as large as a football stadium. The hope is that it will provide important information on altering the course of comets or asteroids on a collision course with Earth.

Comets are believed to contain materials that have remained largely unchanged since the formation of the Solar System 4.6 billion years (or so) ago. NASA hopes that by getting "under the skin" of Tempel 1, new data will be obtained on the formation of the Solar System and even on how life emerged in our patch of the Universe. Measurement of the chemical composition, density and structure of Tempel 1 will help answer questions about whether organic chemicals and water – essential ingredients for life (or at least life as we know it) – were brought to Earth by comets.

Earlier this year, Russian astrologer Marina Bai issued a writ against NASA to prevent the comet bombardment. One court threw out the case, but the ruling was overturned on 6 May in Moscow's Presnensky district court when Bai's lawyer, Alexandra Molokhova, was able to show that NASA's office in the

US embassy in Moscow fell under Russian jurisdiction. Bai sought a ruling that would restrict NASA in its plans to bombard the comet, as well as punitive damages of 8.7 billion roubles (£170 million) – nearly as much as NASA has spent on the project. "My client believes that the NASA project infringes upon her spiritual and life values as well as the natural life of the cosmos and would disrupt the natural balance of forces in the Universe," said Molokhova. She added that Tempel 1 had sentimental value to Bai because her grandparents met when her grandfather pointed the comet out to his future wife.



By July, Bai was claiming that the collision endangered the future of civilisation. "Nobody has yet proven that this experiment was safe," said Bai's lawyer (who, according to the BBC report, has changed sex since May and is now called Alexander Molokhov). "This impact could have altered the orbit of the comet, so there is now a chance that the Tempel may well destroy the Earth some day!" This claim was brushed aside by NASA mission engineer Shadoan Ardan. "The analogy is a mosquito hitting the front of an airliner in flight," he said. "The effect is negligible."

Marina Bai's legal team remained confident, and were even looking for volunteers to join in on the claim. "The impact changed the magnetic properties of the comet," said Mr or Ms Molokhov(a), "and this could have affected mobile telephony here on Earth. If your phone went down this morning, ask yourself Why? And then get in touch with us." The court's decision is unlikely to be announced for at least another month. [AFP] 6 May; BBC News, 4 July; D.Telegraph, 5 July 2005.

EXTRA EXTRA

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

OPTIMISTS CLUB CALLS IT QUITS

[AP] 29 Nov 2004.

MURDERED WIFE WENT 'ABSOLUTELY BERSERK'

Guardian, 30 Nov 2004.

HEAD IS REMOVED IN PROBE

D.Mirror, 1 Dec 2004.

SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIM WANTS AN APOLOGY FROM THE POPE

Scotsman, 2 Dec 2004.

IS THE ARK OF THE COVENANT BURIED IN NAPTON?

Leamington Spa Courier, 3 Dec 2004.

SANTA TOO BUSY TO MEET CHILDREN

Guardian, 8 Dec 2004.

NATIVITY 'SHEEP' IN BLAZE TERROR

Birmingham Eve. Mail, 9 Dec 2004.

UGLY WOMEN GET LESS AID

The Star (Malaysia), 11 Dec 2004.

BANDIT CHOSEN FOR KING

D.Mail, 13 Dec 2004.

FIRST SNOOZING JELLYFISH FOUND

Melbourne Herald-Sun, 16 Dec 2004.

HIJACK CRUMBLED WHEN GUNMEN BRANDISHED CROISSANTS

Irish Times, 17 Dec 2004.

UGLY DUCK RETURNS AS DIVORCED SWAN

Metro, 22 Dec 2004.

JAPAN TO SLAY ZOMBIES

Western Daily Press, 29 Dec 2004.

GERMAN SUPERMODEL TO MARRY SEAL

Independent, 2 Jan 2005.

BOFFINS TEACH RATS JAPANESE

Sun, 10 Jan 2005.





Affray at the races

Five jockeys crashed to the turf and were injured on 30 March when hundreds of seagulls flew into horses racing down the home straight at Melbourne's Sandown racetrack in Australia. Mayhem erupted in the last race as 11 horses charged towards a huge flock of gulls about 200m (650ft) from the finish. The birds took off in panic, flying into the gallopers who shied and sent their riders sprawling. Brady Cross suffered a broken arm; Darren Gauci, chipped teeth and a sore neck; Chris Symons, a bruised shoulder; Luke Nolen, a sprained thumb; and Michael Guthrie, bruising. Nick Ryan was catapulted into the air, but managed to scramble back into the saddle. Peter Mertens, who was first past the post, said he had four seagulls in his lap and no idea where he was going. Only five runners finished and the race was declared void. *Melbourne Herald-Sun*, 31 Mar 2005.

PHOTOS: NEWSPIX/NICOLE GARMSTON



SIDELINES...

FROG RAIN

Traffic came to a halt and locals fled inside after thousands of frogs fell from the sky on to the village of Odzaci in Serbia, 75 miles (120km) northwest of Belgrade, on 5 June. The frogs, different from those usually seen in the area, survived the fall and hopped around in search of water. "This huge 'cloud' seemed to come out of nowhere and its shape and colour looked very strange," said Caja Jovanovic. "Suddenly frogs started to fall from the sky. I thought maybe a plane carrying frogs had exploded in midair." A local climatology expert repeated the traditional 'whirlwind' explanation. *South African Press Association, Ananova, 7 June 2005.*

WELL, STONE ME

A huge boulder has appeared in a field in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It wasn't there last year when corn was harvested, and, weighing an estimated 15,000lb (6,800kg) – 6.7 tons – it is too big to have been rolled there. It can't be a meteorite because it lacks burn marks, and has made no crater. *Independent on Sunday, 29 May 2005.*

'MUTANT' SUPER KIDS

Professor Vladimir Mikhalev from Bryansk State University in southern Russia has tracked the health of children growing up in areas close to the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and found that on average they have higher IQ and faster reaction times than those from areas unaffected by radioactive fallout. They are also growing faster and have stronger immune systems. *Sun, 26 May 2005.*



MARTIN ROSS

Every dog has its day

There's no end to the new tricks that old dogs are coming up with



REUTERS / MAUELA HARTLING

WORD WIZARDS

As dog owners have known for centuries, their pets really can understand much of what they say. Researchers have found a border collie who recognises more than 200 words and can learn new ones as quickly as a three-year-old child. Rico, who was born in December 1994, lives with Susanne Baus in Dortmund, Germany. Most of the words he knows are the names of toys. When she says "Rico, wo ist der Banane [where is the banana]?" – or panda, blue dinosaur, tiger, camel, werewolf – the dog searches, out of sight of the owner, until he finds the named item. In a series of controlled experiments by Dr Julia Fischer and colleagues from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Rico correctly retrieved 37 out of 40 toys from a collection when they were called for. His vocabulary was estimated to

Border collie Rico knows more than 200 words

be similar to that of language-trained chimps, rhesus monkeys, sea lions, dolphins and parrots.

Dr Fischer then tested Rico's ability to learn new words, placing seven well known toys in a room with one that the dog had never seen before. Ms Baus then asked him to fetch the toy using an unfamiliar word. Seven times out of 10 he brought back the appropriate toy. A month later, he correctly remembered the name of the new toy in three out of six sessions. This suggests he is using a system called "fast-mapping" that enables young

DOG OF MANY WORDS: Rico selected the correct toy in 37 of 40 attempts.

children to learn new words by a process of elimination. The study is the first to show fast-mapping in animals. Rico's talents suggest lack of understanding is not the barrier that prevented language evolving in other species.

Dr Paul Bloom, a psychologist at Yale University in Connecticut and an expert on how people learn the meaning of words, called for further experiments to answer several questions: Can Rico learn a word for something other than a small object to be fetched? Can he display knowledge of a word in some way other than fetching? Can he follow an instruction *not* to fetch something? Fischer and her colleagues are still working with Rico to see if he comprehends requests to put toys in boxes or to bring them to certain people, and the results

EPH / WASSIL DONEY

look promising.

Ben, another border collie who lives with Clive Pedley in Bridport, Dorset, has learned the name of over 50 toys and can collect them on request, even in the dark. "He invariably brings back the right toy," said Mr Pedley.

There have been precedents: in 1883, for instance, John Lubbock, the first Lord Avebury, was sent a black terrier puppy called Van. Lubbock trained Van by placing cards with printed words over everyday objects. Ten days later he took the objects away and left the puppy to work out how to ask for a bone, water or food by selecting the correct card. "No one," he concluded, "who has seen him look down a row of cards and pick up the one he wanted could doubt that in bringing a card he felt he was making a request, and that he could not only distinguish one card from another but also associate word and object." Van was the subject of an article in

Nature, and excited the interest of WE Gladstone, the Prime Minister. *Western Morning News*, 8 Jan; *Science*, v.304, p.1682; [AP] *aljazeera.net*, 10 June; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, *Sun*, *Independent*, 11 June; *Guardian*, 11+17 June; *New Scientist*, 19 June 2004.

CLAIRVOYANT CANINE?

Treasure hunter Philip Coombs had been out in a field with his detector for about half an hour when he was joined by a large boxer dog who repeatedly clamped his jaws on the search head as Mr Coombs swung it back and forth. Then he heard the dog's owner shouting "Benji, Benji!" but the dog wouldn't leave him. He walked towards the owner, Benji was safely attached to his lead, and he was able to resume detecting. Mr Coombs described what happened next in a letter to *Treasure Hunting* (March 2005): "After two hours without a decent signal, I decided to try a different field

about half a mile away. Within 20 minutes of detecting I got a peach of a signal and, after digging down about 4in [10cm], I retrieved what I thought was my first coin of the day, but on cleaning the earth from it all I could see inscribed on a metal plate was Benji's name and address looking up at me!"

GOOD DOGGIE!

A man named only as Aurel C who suffered a heart attack while alone in his house in Focsani, Romania, was saved by his nine-year-old German Shepherd. "I tried to get to the phone in the other room but had no power to move," he said. "With my last strength I told the dog, 'fetch the phone Max,' and like in a dream I saw him snatching the phone from the wall and bringing it under my nose. I called the ambulance and woke up at the hospital. I can't wait to go back home to my Max." *Ananova*, 24 Sept 2004.

SIDELINES...

HIS REALLY DARK SIDE

As 15 female factory workers waited at a bus stop in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, a man in full Darth Vader outfit got out of his car, strutted in front of them, flashed his genitals, jumped back in the car and drove off, leaving many of the women screaming. He later exposed himself to a second group outside another factory. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 27 May 2005.

A SNIP TOO FAR

Hair-snippers continue their furtive activities, as in Fort's day. One 59-year-old "rogue stylist" was arrested in Victoria, British Columbia, on 17 February, after he tried to cut a hank of hair from a woman on a bus. He had struck at least three times before, once the previous November and twice on 10 January, on another bus and in a queue for Macdonald's. *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist*, 12+18 Feb 2005.

OUT WITH A BANG

The pioneer "gonzo" journalist Hunter S Thompson, 67, allegedly shot himself in the head on 20 February. Next August, his final wish will be granted when his ashes are blasted from a giant cannon, mounted inside a 53ft (16m) high sculpture of his trademark "gonzo" fist. This in turn will be fixed on top of a 100ft (30m) pillar, and will become a permanent fixture in the grounds of his home in Aspen, Colorado. "He loved explosions," said his widow. [AP] 24 Feb; [PA] 7 April 2005.

CORPSE IGNORED

Kathleen Wilson's body lay on the kitchen floor of her house in Fairfield, California, for nearly two years after she died - with her son and husband stepping around the corpse as they prepared meals and went on with daily life. Police finally discovered the body on 18 March and arrested the son, Jack Wilson, 48, on suspicion of "elder abuse". The husband, Harry Wilson, 81, was taken into care. *Washington Post*, 22 Mar 2005.



"Dog's spin"

Every year, the villagers of Brodilovo in Bulgaria, some 560km (350 miles) from Sofia, hold a *trichana na kuche* (dog's spin) ceremony to ensure prosperity. They tie dogs to a

device made of two twisted ropes and spin them around, frightening them so badly they empty their bowels. Ancient custom dictates that the more faeces the dogs pro-

duce, the healthier and wealthier the year will be for Brodilovo.

This photo was taken at the latest ceremony on 5 March, which may well be the last, as animal welfare groups

have mounted vigorous protests. *D.Record*, 7 Mar 2005.

Letters of complaint can be sent to the UK Bulgarian Embassy, 186-188 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5HL. www.bulgaria2net.com

SIDELINES...

JOHN PAUL RETURNS

Grandmother Mary Ward was having her highlights done at the Cut and Dye salon in Ballygraique, Co. Tipperary in Ireland, when she had a vision of the late Pope. "The view appeared on my lap on the black gown," she said. "He was smiling. I then asked one of the girls if she could see anything, and she said 'Oh my God, it's the Pope'." Mrs Ward set up a shrine at home with the gown as centrepiece. *Irish Examiner*, via *Independent on Sunday*, 17 April 2005.

SLEEP TEXTING

Richard Griffiths, 23, from Swansea, claims to send text messages in his sleep. While having a nightmare, he texted his mother: "Help, I'm in trouble, someone's chasing me." After watching *The Jungle Book*, he texted a friend: "Baloo, have you seen Bagheera?" *Independent on Sunday*, 6 Feb 2005.

SOCCER SPOOK

Sunderland soccer team won eight games in a row, but their luck changed after coaching staff spotted a shadowy black figure at their training ground in Whitburn, South Tyneside. Two physios chased the apparition before it vanished and striker Stephen Elliott also claims to have seen the ghost – thought (why, heaven knows) to be that of a local recluse and wrecker in the 18th century called Spottee. Shortly after the sightings, the Championship leaders lost 2-1 at home to Reading on 9 April. *D.Mirror*, *Sun*, 16 April 2005.



MARTIN ROSS

Number-crunching

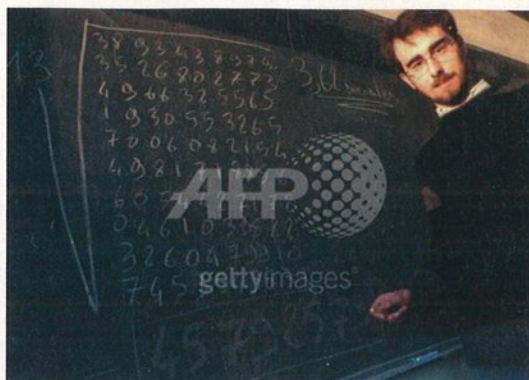
Extraordinary mathematical abilities seem to be linked to forms of autism

Alexis Lemaire, 24 (right), has stunned the world of mathematics by working out the 13th root of a 200-digit number in his head in less than nine minutes. By arriving at the 16-digit answer from 390 trillion possibilities, the French computer student has pulled off the most difficult feat of mental arithmetic ever attempted. Next time, he said, he would work even faster. "As this was my first attempt, I was cautious." In a few months, he believes he will beat the one-minute barrier.

He has spent four years developing a secret matrix technique in which he memorises thousands of interlinked tables of numbers to aid his calculations. He subjects his brain to intensive training, with three hours of mind games a day. He can readily move information from his short-term memory and anchor it in his long-term memory. Last December, he took only 3.62 seconds to find the 13th root of a 100-digit number, obliterating the previous record of 13.55 seconds held by a German, Gert Mittring. Lemaire wants to find practical uses for his skill: learning 40 languages simultaneously or becoming a card sharp to clean up at poker.

"It's all about thinking visually," he said. "I have a map or matrix in my head of thousands of tables that I have learned side by side. I can scroll through them and pick out the numbers I need. Above all, you need to link the different items. If you forget something, you have lost the link to that memory, but if you have created several links, even if one breaks you can choose another route." For anyone seeking to challenge his record, Lemaire has an invaluable tip: all answers begin with 2.

Bernard Mazoyer, who runs a brain-imaging centre in Caen University, has studied the brain activity of a fellow prodigy, Rudiger Gamm, from Germany, and concluded that such arithmeticians coached their brains to behave differently.



"Training has modified the brain's wiring and the size of cerebral areas," he said, and warned that such training risked developing a form of adult autism. *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 April 2005.

Daniel Tammet, 26, set a new record last year when he flawlessly recalled π to 22,514 decimal places over five hours. He runs an on-line tutoring business from his home in Herne Bay, Kent, and speaks French, German, Lithuanian and Esperanto. He taught himself Spanish in a weekend and is currently mastering Romanian when not developing his own new language, Mänti, loosely based on Finnish and Estonian. His most frequently used phrase in Mänti is "Lahtuka illa linnut!" ("Leave the birds alone!"), which he is constantly shouting at his cats. He is a "prodigious savant", one of an exclusive club of only 50 people in the world with such extraordinary mental abilities. He also has Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism that largely precludes the ability to empathise with others. Tammet, however, is uniquely articulate about the workings of his mind.

He is able to describe his synaesthesia – words and emotions experienced as colours, textures or pictures. The word "complex", for example, is a braid of hair; "fragile" makes him think of glass. He explains his fluency with numbers as the result of the way he perceives them: for him, every number up to 10,000 has a unique visual form. "Different numbers have different colours, shapes and textures," he says. "[The number] one is very bright and shining,

like someone flashing a light into my face. Two is like a movement from right to left. Five is a clap of thunder or the sound of a wave against a rock. Six I find more difficult; it's more like a hole or a chasm. When I multiply numbers, I see two shapes in a landscape. The space between the images makes a third shape, like a jigsaw piece. And that third shape gradually crystallises;

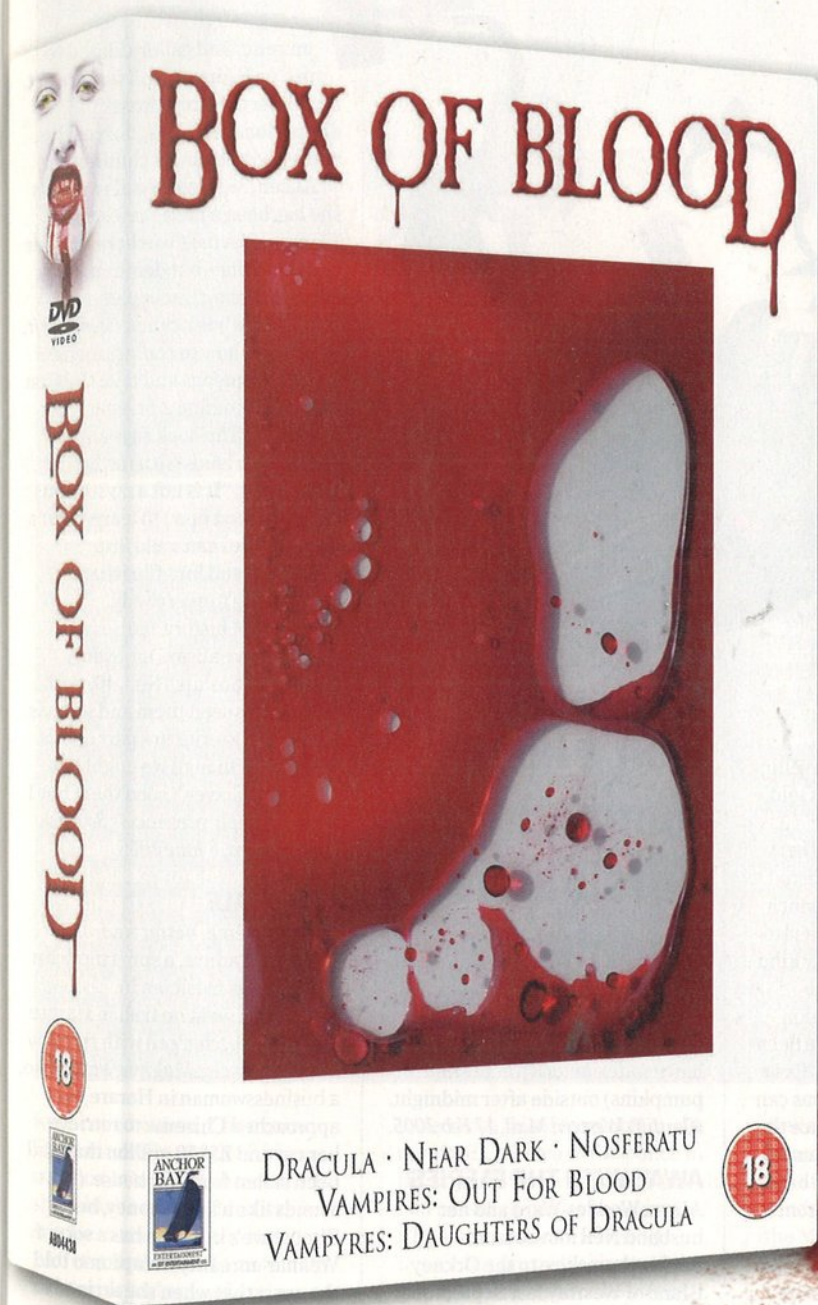
es; I see a fuzziness that becomes clearer and clearer." The whole process he describes takes place in a flash. He likens it to what happens when a native speaker opens his or her mouth to speak, and a perfectly grammatical sentence comes out without conscious thought.

When he was three, he had a series of seizures. Epilepsy is relatively common among people with autism, although no one at the time knew he was autistic. The epilepsy is thought to have rewired his brain; it may have triggered the synaesthesia. Three years ago, he converted from atheism to Christianity, largely thanks to the essays of GK Chesterton, his favourite author. He still struggles with some everyday skills; for instance, he can't drive, because his mind tends to wander, he is disturbed by crowds and has to avoid pebble beaches because of an insatiable urge to count all the stones.

His story was the subject of a documentary, "The Boy with the Incredible Brain" (Channel 5, 23 May 2005), broadcast previously in the US under the title "Brain Man" – an echo of the 1988 film *Rain Man* (in which Dustin Hoffman plays the real-life autistic savant Kim Peek). The programme makers set Tammet a series of tests, one of which was to learn Icelandic within a week. He was given a tutor who declared the task impossible. A week later, he appeared on television and gave an interview in perfect Icelandic. *Independent*, 5 May; *D.Mirror*, 16 May; *Church Times*, 20 May 2005. For more on Asperger's syndrome, see FT168:20; and on synaesthesia, see FT113:28-31; FT115:52.

BOX OF BLOOD

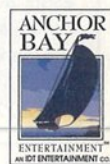
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SIDELINES...

HOPPING ROMANCE

"I just thought my wife Helena already has everything a woman can dream about – me, of course, and our daughters – so I decided to express my everlasting love to her with two wonderful Australian kangaroos," said Elmet Erik, 49, an Estonian farmer. The two marsupials could be seen hopping through the snow at the Eriks' farm on the island of Muhu. *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, 14 Feb 2005.

NO GOOD! NO GOOD!

Ming Kuang Chen, 32, vanished on 1 April after delivering a takeaway meal from the Happy Dragon restaurant in the Bronx, New York, to an apartment building, Tracey Towers. Despite a massive police search, he wasn't discovered until 5 April, trapped in the building's second lift. Mr Chen, an illegal immigrant from Fujian in China who speaks no English, was stuck for nearly 80 hours after the lift jammed between floors. His pleas over the intercom were answered, but he was able to say only "No good! No good!" and the janitor thought he was a drunk. *[R]* 6 April 2005.

JOKE FALLS FLAT

Traffic cop Marius Vlasceanu pulled over Gheorghe Tosa as he drove through Craiova in Romania, fined him £22 and handed him a ticket explaining that the fine was for "having a face like a moron and being a big monkey". The unamused motorist complained to the chief of police and Vlasceanu was demoted and given a desk job in a remote village. *Ananova*, 6 May 2005.

DEATH DETAINED

Donald Death Jr, 60, of Locust Valley, Long Island, was charged with embezzling more than \$293,070 from the Locust Valley Cemetery Association. Death, who is the chairman and assistant treasurer of the cemetery association, pleaded not guilty. His lawyer said he had "borrowed" the money and it had all been paid back. *[AP]* 30 Mar; *NY Post*, 31 Mar 2005.

Other-worldly beings

The appearance of weird entities and the disappearance of pigeons



CHRIS BUTLER

STRANGE FRUIT

Professor Vukanovic was travelling in the Balkans when gypsies told him about vampiric plants, according to his account in *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. "There are only two plants which are regarded as likely to turn into vampires: pumpkins of every kind and watermelons," wrote the professor. "This transformation occurs if the vegetables have been kept for more than 10 days." Even keeping them after Christmas can start the transformation. Once the watermelons start shaking and making strange noises like "brrrl, brrrl, brrrl", the transition from fruit to fiend has started. Sometimes a drop of blood can be seen on the watermelon – a sure sign of the vampire within. According to the professor: "These pumpkins and melons go round the houses, stables and rooms at night, all by themselves, and do harm to people." The only way to kill vampire watermelons is to boil them alive, scrub them with a brush and then burn the brush. Whether the gypsies were pulling the professor's leg or not is unknown. But we recommend

Don't leave pumpkins outside after midnight

erring on the side of caution: don't leave watermelons (or any kind of pumpkins) outside after midnight. *(Cardiff)* *Western Mail*, 17 Feb 2005.

AWAY WITH THE FAERIES

Alicen Weddes-Ward and her husband Neil moved from Buckinghamshire to the Orkney island of Westray last September, and plan to create Britain's first museum of faeries in an old croft house next door to their home in Skelwick. To this end, local enterprise chiefs have given them £4,000 and the local council £300. The couple are regarded as experts on faeries and say Orkney is a hotspot of "otherworldly things". They were delighted by local support and received just one letter opposing their plans. The

museum and gallery, slated to open on 6 August, will feature art by Neil, sculptures, three-dimensional displays, storytelling and a pixie house for children.

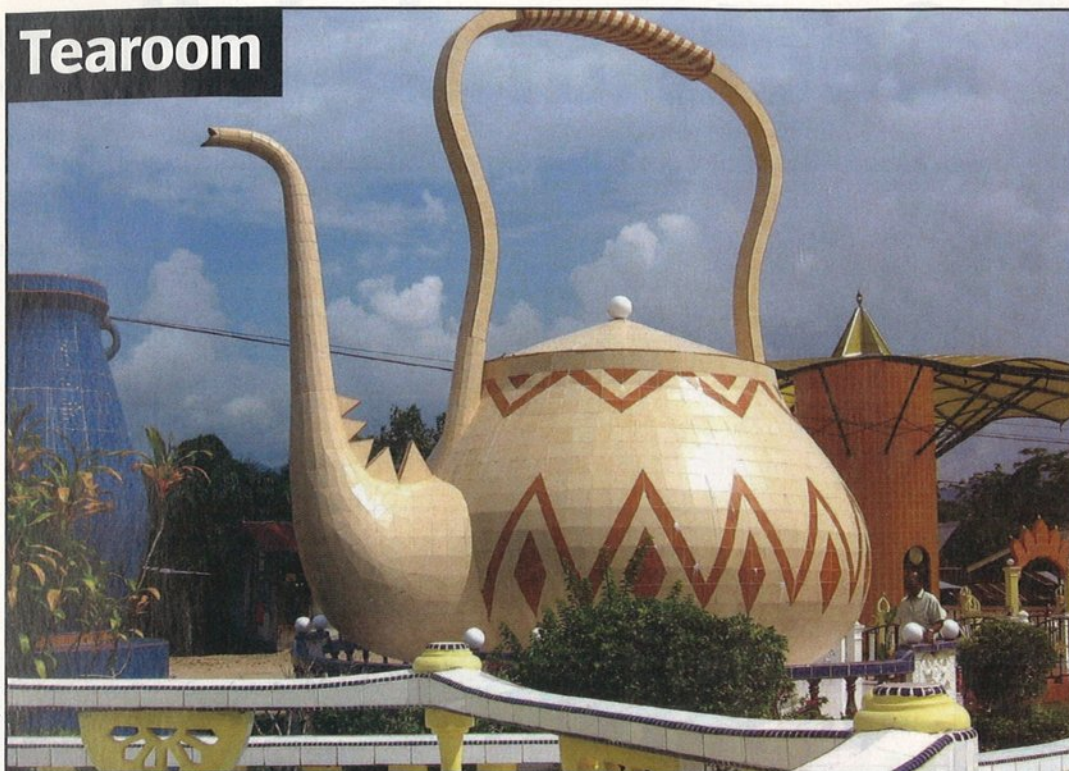
Alicen, 36, a mother of two, says she has been a faerie priestess for 15 years. She uses witchcraft in her faerie routines but denies being a witch. In June, the couple published a book called *Faeriecraft*, describing how to contact faerie kings and queens and take the first steps to becoming a priest or priestess. "The book says anyone can make friends with the faeries," said Alicen. "It is not a mysterious thing that you need to learn from a guru. Faeries can meld into witchcraft and into Christianity, they belong to everybody. Throughout history, faeries and witches have always enjoyed a good relationship." Neil, 40, said: "Alicen has seen them and she has learnt that faeries are part of this world even though we might not see them. I haven't seen them but I have felt their presence." *Scottish Daily Record*, 6 June 2005.

FISHY TALE

Edna Chizema, better known as Ambuya Maduve, a spirit medium and popular musician in Zimbabwe, went on trial in Harare on 16 March, charged with theft by false pretences. Magistrate Mapfumo, a businesswoman in Harare, had approached Chizema to retrieve her car and Z\$150 million that had been stolen from her house. (This sounds like a lot of money, but Zimbabwe's inflation has a sort of Weimar unreality). Mapfumo told the court that when she arrived at the Chizema residence, a "mystery voice" told her to buy five return air tickets to fly in mermaids from London so that they could retrieve her car and cash. Like many Shona people, Mapfumo believed that mermaids (*injuzo* in Ndebele) had awesome powers.

When the medium came to collect the money for the fares, Mapfumo asked for the names of the mermaids. "I was told they

Tearoom



The Sky Kingdom sect, led by Ariffin Mohamad (better known as Ayah Pin), has a six-acre (2.4ha) oil palm plantation in Kampung La, in the Malaysian district of Besut. The plantation is (or was) dominated by a building the size of a two-story house and shaped like a giant pink teapot. Next to it is (or was) an umbrella-shaped orange building and an assortment of other objects, such as a concrete replica of a longboat and a "palace" where followers gathered to chant. Ayah Pin claims the sect – active since the early 1990s – has several thousand followers in Malaysia,

Singapore, Bali and beyond. He said the giant teapot was inspired by the dreams of one of the sect's followers, and reflects a similar vessel in the sky that God uses to shower his blessings on mankind. Followers who come to the village for the first time have to drink holy water pouring from a giant vase that is perpetually filled by the teapot.

Ayah Pin and several of his followers spent two years in jail for unspecified "deviant activities" in 1998. In April 2005, the Besut District Council told the sect that it had until 29 May to demolish the teapot and other structures, as they

contravened planning regulations for agricultural land. If the sect failed to act, the council would seek a court order to tear the motley structures down. An unnamed follower said Ayah Pin had engaged a lawyer and the structures would not be demolished. *New Straits Times (Malaysia)*, 26 May 2005.

FT is reminded of the giant concrete statue of Gilbert Bourdin, founder of the Golden Lotus sect, which was blown up by the authorities in Castellane, southern France, in 2001, only five days before the demolition of the World Trade Center [FT152:13].

were called Emma, Charmaine, Sharvine, Bella and the fifth one was said to be an Arab mermaid," she told the court (which was in stitches throughout the hearing). "After a week or so, I was told the mermaids had arrived and were to stay at the Jameson Hotel and that I had to pay the hotel bills. All the time she told me that I couldn't see the mermaids since only spirit mediums could do so... I was told that Charmaine's brother had come from England [and] I had to buy him a return ticket since he was running Charmaine's businesses back in England." She also had to provide the mermaids with mobile phones and generators. When her car and

stolen cash failed to reappear, she reported Chizema to the police in the hope of retrieving the £5,000 she had passed to her for her services. FT has not seen any follow-up report, but presumes the medium was obliged to return the money. *www.newzimbabwe.com*, 17 Mar; [AFP] 25 Mar 2005.

VANISHING PIGEONS

On 18 July, 2,000 homing pigeons were released for a race between the cities of Ljungby and Malmö in southern Sweden, a distance of 93 miles (159km). Four days later, only 500 had returned to their lofts. In past races, the birds, all of which have electronic identification tags,

made the journey in about two hours. "The weather was perfect – no rain, no thunder and no strong winds," said Lars-Aake Nilsson of the Malmö Homing Pigeon Club. "I have worked with pigeons since 1960 and have never experienced anything like this. Even though some are lost to hawks or hazards like power lines along the way, many more should have made it back home."

He speculated that the birds might have been thrown off course by subtle changes in the Earth's magnetic field. There had been no reported sightings of the missing birds anywhere in southern Sweden. [AP] 22 July 2004.

SIDELINES...

THROWING A WOBBLY

Hours before his graduation ceremony at Riverside high school, an 18-year-old student shot dead his mother and two grandparents, a schooffriend and a 14-year-old girl at neighbouring farmhouses near Bellefontaine, Ohio. His grimly appropriate name was Scott Moody. *Guardian*, 31 May 2005.

ASBO DUMMO

Stephen Winstone, 38, was arrested for being drunk and disorderly in Weymouth Caravan Park in Dorset. He was already the subject of a two-year Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO). However, he was merely fined £100 instead of being sent to jail, as the ineptly phrased ASBO specifically states that he is "prohibited from not being drunk in a public place". *Dorset Echo*, 17 Mar 2005.

SURFING HAZARD

Walter Mueller, 36, from Schleswig-Holstein, closed all the windows in his flat and emptied several cans of extra strong insect-spray before sitting at his computer to surf the Internet. A spark ignited the powerful fumes, causing an explosion that demolished the flat and blew out all the windows. Debris flew up to 100 metres (330ft) away and the street had to be closed for several hours; but amazingly Mueller was not badly hurt and was released from hospital after treatment for minor injuries. [R] 17 May 2005.

LETHAL FLIES

More than 300 cows, sheep and pigs were bitten to death by flies over the weekend of 28/29 May in Latvia. Warm temperatures after an unusually damp spring created ideal conditions for the massive swarms. *Scotsman*, 31 May 2005.



BEASTLY BABEL

● US-made audio players installed at Beijing's international airport to scare birds off the runway failed due to the "language barrier", the *China Daily* claimed. They played sounds of predators such as hawks to shoo away birds posing a danger to aircraft, but the pests seemed unruffled by the "foreign" squawks – so staff hastily recorded Chinese hawks. Authorities are waiting to see if this works as the birds they are trying to scare off are migratory and had left after feeding on grass beside the airstrip. *Melbourne Age*, 11 Mar 2005.

● Researchers in Spain have shown that rats can use the rhythm of human language to tell the difference between Dutch and Japanese – the first time this skill has been shown in an animal other than a monkey. The report was published in the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behaviour Processes*.

Neuroscientist Juan Toro and his team at Barcelona's Scientific Park trained 64 adult male rats, with food rewards, to respond to either Dutch or Japanese. The rats were separated into four groups: one heard each language spoken by a native; one heard synthesised speech; one heard sentences read out in either language by different speakers; and a fourth heard the languages played backwards. Rats rewarded for responding to Japanese didn't respond to Dutch and vice versa. No rat could tell apart the languages played backwards. *[R]* 11 Jan 2005.

● Howlett and Port Lympne Wild Animal Park near Hythe in Kent was given 19 Guinea baboons by Paris zoo, which had a surplus. "Our keepers quickly had to learn some basic French commands, as that is all they have ever heard," said Veronica Crisp, the zoo's marketing manager. "If we speak English to them they just look completely bemused and don't have a clue what is going on. The keepers use basic things like *déjeuner* when it's lunchtime and they all come running. Then there's things like *bonjour*, which they respond well to. Obviously, they don't understand the word as such, but it's the sound they recognise. We're just hoping the next group we inherit aren't Russian!" *Guardian*, *D.Mirror*, 22 Jan 2005.



Sects and violins



ROSS COLLINS

Emily Oster, an economics student at Harvard, is thought to be the first researcher to check witch trial records against weather data. In her paper, published in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, she argues that the most active period of witchcraft trials coincided with a spell of low temperatures, which increased the frequency of crop failures and impeded fish migration to northern Europe. "Witches became targets for blame," she wrote, "because there was an existing cultural framework that both allowed their persecution and suggested they could control the weather."

The greatest obstacle to proving the theory was a lack of detailed weather records, but Oster found general data on winter severity and temperature changes by the decade. She also found annual records for the Geneva region. "Overall, these results suggest that decreases in temperature led to more witchcraft trials," she said. The biggest number of trials – in 1740 – came just after the sharpest fall in temperature. Oster also studied modern African witch-hunts and found that most victims were older women. The murders increased when severe

Murders increased in severe weather

weather harmed crops – suggesting that families were killing their least productive members. *Sunday Times*, 19 Dec 2004.

The so-called Little Ice Age gripped Europe from the mid-15th century until the early 19th century, and was at its coldest from 1645 to 1715, a period known as the Maunder Minimum after the 19th century astronomer EW Maunder, who documented a drop in solar activity. The unusually long winters and cool summers saw temperatures in Central Europe fall some 1–2°C (1.8–3.6°F) below today's averages. The Alps were hit very hard, with glaciers advancing so far that villages were crushed. At Charmonix at the foot of Mont Blanc in the French Alps,

villagers became so desperate that the Bishop of Geneva performed a rite of exorcism on the Des Bois glacier to try to halt its advance.

For centuries, experts have debated whether special varnishes or wood treatments were the

secret of the rich resonance of violins made by Antonio Stradivarius (1644–1737). A recent analysis of the tree rings in the spruce wood used by Stradivarius at his studio in Cremona, northern Italy, offers an alternate (or at least an additional) explanation: that the harsh climate of the Maunder Minimum produced exceptionally narrow tree rings.

"Narrow rings in the spruce would not only strengthen the violin but would also increase the wood's density," said Professor Henri Grissino-Mayer, a dendrochronologist at Tennessee's Laboratory of Tree-Ring Science. "That dense wood has thicker cell walls, which resonate much better, with superior tonal qualities, than thinner cell walls. The tree-ring data that we analysed throughout Europe all show that at the highest elevations tree growth was extremely slow from 1645 to 1715... when the skills of the Cremonese violin-makers reached their zenith." Their spruce is thought to have come from the Alpine region north of Cremona, in an area still known today as the Forest of the Violins. *Times*, 10 Dec 2003.

Surrogate mothers



FEEDING TIME AT THE ZOO

A Burmese woman breastfed two Bengal tiger cubs at Yangon Zoological Garden in Rangoon after they were removed from their aggressive mother. Hla Htay, 40, (above) a relative of a zoo employee with three children, the youngest seven months old, offered her services after the cubs' mother, Noah Noah, killed the third member of her litter. The two others, a male and a female, were taken from her and received bottle-feeds as well as Hla Htay's milk for half an hour four times a day. "I felt sorry for them so I decided to feed them before their teeth grow," she said. Unfortunately, they died of dehydration after six weeks, as their livers could not accept human milk. The female cub died on 27 April and the male on 3 May. They will be stuffed and put on display at a museum.

The cubs were born at the zoo on 17 March, the first there for 16 years. The global population of the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is estimated at fewer than

2,500, a tenth of which live in Burma, where they are under threat from poachers seeking to feed markets for traditional medicines and trophies. Noah Noah and her mate were one of two pairs of tigers sent to the zoo from Thailand four years ago as part of an animal exchange. *D.Telegraph, Ananova, 4 April; Scotsman, 13 May 2005*.

PUPPY LOVE

Kura "Kat" Tumanako of Hastings, New Zealand, (left) started breastfeeding her Staffordshire bull terrier pup twice a day when her three-month-old baby daughter stopped taking her milk.

"I wanted to bring Honey Boy [the pup] up with the baby," she said. "He will protect her as they grow up. He drinks more than the baby. It doesn't hurt. It's a bit ticklish."

She planned to wean Honey Boy after six weeks. *Brisbane Courier-Mail, 18 Nov; Gold Coast Bulletin, 19 Nov 2004.*

• For a Norwegian woman breastfeeding puppies, see **FT169:22**.



RESCUED BY LIONS

A girl of 12 was abducted and beaten by seven men trying to force her to marry one of them in Bitu Genet, the provincial capital of Ethiopia's Kefa province, about 350 miles (560km) southwest of Addis Ababa. The girl, missing for a week, was found on 9 June guarded by three lions, which apparently had chased off her captors. Sergeant Wondimu Wedajo said she had been guarded by the lions for about half a day. "They stood guard until [police and family] found her and then they just left her like a gift and went back into the forest," he said, adding he did not know whether they were male or female. "Everyone thinks this is some kind of miracle," he said, "because normally the lions would attack people."

Stuart Williams, a wildlife expert with the rural development ministry, suggested the girl might have survived because she was crying from the trauma of her attack. "A young girl whimpering could be mistaken for the mewling sound from a lion cub, which in turn could explain why they didn't eat her," he said. Ethiopia's lions, famous for their large black manes, are the country's national symbol and adorn statues and the local currency. Former emperor Haile Selassie kept a pride in the royal palace in Addis Ababa. Only 1,000 are estimated to remain in the wild, as farmers encroach on bush land and hunters kill them for their skins, which can fetch \$1,000.

The girl, the youngest of four siblings, was "shocked and terrified" and had to be treated for the cuts from her beatings, Wondimu said. Police caught four of the abductors while three remained at large. Kidnapping young girls has long been part of the marriage custom in Ethiopia. The United Nations estimates that more than 70 per cent of marriages in Ethiopia are by abduction, practised in rural areas where most of the country's 71 million people live. *[AP] 21 June 2005.*





alien zoo

DR KARL SHUKER's look at the animal kingdom reveals a brand-new rodent family, a new type of mangabey monkey and another explanation for Egede's sea serpent.

ROCK RAT IS A SHOCK RAT!

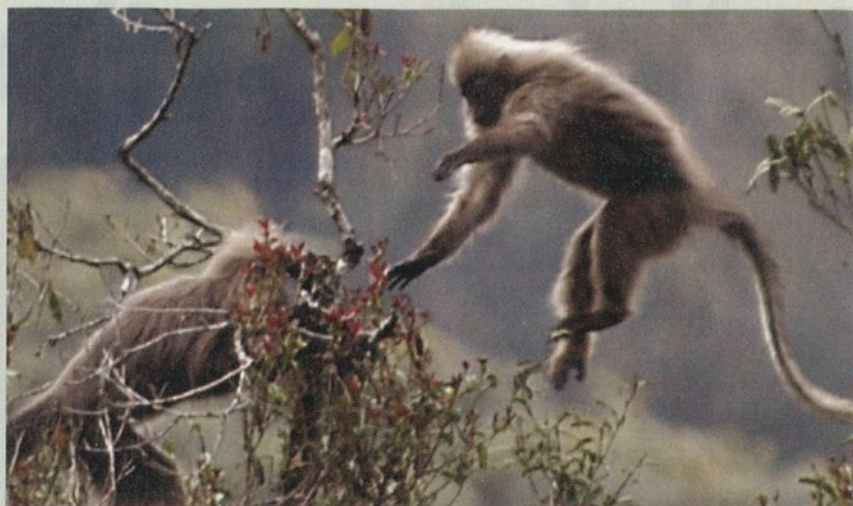
The scientific world was shocked by a recent revelation of the rodent kind in Laos. For this newly revealed species has proven to be so dramatically different from all other known rodents that an entirely new taxonomic family has been created to accommodate it! Bearing in mind that the last new family of rodents was named in 1941 (for Selevin's dormouse *Selevinia betpakdalaensis*) and that the last family of any type of mammal was established in 1974 (for Kitt's hog-nosed bumblebee bat *Craseonycteris thonglongyai*), this is a truly historic discovery – yet made in the most mundane manner.

One morning in 1996, Wildlife Conservation Society scientist Dr Robert Timmins was strolling through a market in the Khammouan region of Laos when he spotted the body of an unusual-looking rodent for sale on a food stall, next to some vegetables. Unable to identify it, he enquired what it was, and learnt from the locals that it was a kha-nyou (pronounced 'ga-nyou') or rock rat, and that such



creatures were trapped in the limestone karst close by. Timmins obtained some specimens, and so too, albeit totally independently and two years later, did fellow zoologist Dr Mark Robinson. A series of specimens was then sent for identification to the Natural History Museum in London, and tissue samples were sent for DNA analysis to Vermont University.

After extensive studies, the scientists working on this material agreed that the kha-nyou was wholly distinct from anything previously documented by science, and in 2005 it was formally described by Timmins and Robinson, who named it *Laonastes aenigmamus*. Recalling an unlikely hybrid of squirrel and large dark rat, the kha-nyou has long whiskers, large paws, sturdy limbs, and a thick furry tail, and measures approximately 40cm (16in) in total length. Moreover, unlike most rodents, instead of giving birth to a litter of young, it apparently gives birth to a single baby at a time. It seems to be nocturnal, and to be at least predominantly herbivorous. Most notable of all, however, is that, based upon its cranial and skeletal structure plus its DNA profile, the kha-nyou appears to have branched off from all other rodents many millions of years ago, and may be ancestral to the hystricognaths (porcupines, chinchillas, guinea pigs, capybaras, etc). www.ens-newswire.com/ens/may2005/2005-05-12-05.asp 12 May 2005; *New Scientist*, 12 May 2005.



BARKING UP THE RIGHT TREE

Just as the kha-nyou was discovered independently by two different researchers, a remarkable new monkey was revealed independently by two different scientific teams working hundreds of miles apart from one another in Tanzania. One team was based on Mount Rungwe and in Kitulo National Park, the other in Ndundulu Forest Reserve in the Udzungwa Mountains. During 2003, both teams encountered an unfamiliar type of tree-dwelling mangabey, which voiced a very distinctive, low-pitched, but loud honking bark, wholly unlike the whooping gobble sounds produced by other mangabey species.

The scientists were first alerted to the new mangabey's existence by locals, who spoke

of a shy monkey known to them as the kipunji, and when the researchers were able to observe some specimens, they realised that their species was totally new to science. Dubbed the highland mangabey, it has now been formally described in a paper jointly written by the two teams, who have named it *Lophocebus kipunji*. Roughly 90cm (35in) long, it has long brownish fur, a noticeable crest and profuse whiskers that give its head a strange triangular appearance, an off-white belly and (long) tail, plus a black face, hands, and feet. This striking animal is the first new species of African monkey to have been discovered for over 20 years, but with less than 1,000 individuals in existence, it is critically endangered. [R] *New York Times*, 19 May; *D.Telegraph*, 20 May 2005.

SEA SERPENTS GET A RISE

One of Dr Bernard Heuvelmans's many postulated categories of sea serpent was the super-otter (which he considered to be a highly primitive, limbed whale), and one of the most important documents cited by him in support of its reality was an encounter in 1734 off the coast of Greenland by missionary's son Poul Egede with an erect cylindrical sea serpent, rising up out of the water. In a recently published paper reappraising this classic sighting, however, Drs Charles Paxton and Sharon Hedley from St Andrews University's Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modelling, in conjunction with Norwegian cryptozoological researcher Erik Knatterud, have proposed a very different,

and memorable, alternative explanation. Namely, that what Egede actually spied was a known species of baleen whale but exhibiting a state of sexual arousal, with its prominent genitalia misidentified by Egede as the flukeless tail of a sea monster. Not a super-otter after all, therefore, but merely another case of mistaken identity – a veritable cryptozoological cock-up, in fact. *Archives of Natural History*, vol.32, pp.1-9 (2005).



Higher powers

New French PM's magic; Pope was predicted

STRUCK BY STIGMATA

Dominique de Villepin, 51, who became French prime minister following the French "non" in the EU referendum, is a "sorcerer" as well as a poet – according to a new biography of the philosopher and writer Bernard-Henri Lévy. In *Une Vie* (A life), Philippe Boggio recounts the first meeting between Lévy and de Villepin in March 1997, when Lévy was depressed by the disastrous reception for his first (and only) film, *Le Jour et la Nuit*. During their conversation, de

Bernard-Henri Lévy

Villepin, then head of President Chirac's private office, compared the philosopher to "a Christ without wounds". Lévy, now 56, was badly shaken by the comparison, and according to several sources – including his wife, the actress and singer Arielle Dombasle – woke that night "with streams of blood on each palm".

For two or three weeks, the bleeding would reappear in the evening. Lévy wore bandages on his palms and was forced to go to his

Dominique de Villepin

Parisian haunt, the Café de Flore, with his hands in his pockets. According to Ms Dombasle: "It was a sign that the psyche of Bernard-Henri Lévy was quarrelling with his body." After unsuccessful treatment in Paris, Milan and London, he went to see de Villepin a second time. "I knew I had powers, and that I am a great African sorcerer, but not to that extent," de Villepin is reported to have said jokingly. "It is an incredible story," writes Boggio, "a story to make your flesh creep, but verified by reliable sources." *Independent*, 7 June 2005.

Pope Benedict XVI

"I know I am a sorcerer"

POPE FORETOLD

John Davidson, 57, of Greenock in Scotland, is well known locally for his predictive powers. For instance, he predicted the number of seats each party would win in the first Scottish parliamentary election. Five years ago, he had a premonition that Joseph Ratzinger would be the next Pope. He wrote this down and gave it in a sealed envelope to a local firm of solicitors eight days later, on 24 January 2000. On 20 April 2005, after the new Pope was elected, he went to the offices of Marie A Land's firm in Nicolson Street, Greenock, and asked them to take the envelope out of their safe. "Ratzinger will become Pope" was written on the back of a Tarot card.

"I am a child of the Sixties," said Mr Davidson, "and... I followed the Beatles and then got into meditation. At the time I was meditating five hours every day. I have been doing it ever since then. Sometimes when I am in a state of meditation I hear things. This was a little different; during meditation, my own internal voice said to me 'Ratzinger will be the next Pope'. It was not as if a message from God came to me." *Greenock Telegraph*, 22 April 2005, plus personal communication.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

87. THE BLACK DEATH



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

The Black Death was so called because its victims turned black – either wholly or in patches, and either before or after death – or because it was "black" in the sense of evil.

The "truth"

For a start, the 14th-century plague that wiped out much of the population of Europe wasn't called Black Death at the time. Its contemporary names mostly described its insatiable appetite, or the terrifying rapidity of its course, such as Great Pestilence, Great Death, or Sudden Death. In some countries, it was named in honour of the neighbours whose fault it supposedly was: Moroccan Fever, or the Italian Death. "Black Death" first appeared in English in the 19th (or, according to some sources, 18th) century. In the early 16th century, Scandinavian scholars mistranslated the Latin term for plague, *atra mors*. "Atra" can mean black, but in this context meant "terrible". Over the next couple of centuries, the new name gradually became universal; in Britain, it was used to differentiate the 1348-50 ghastliness from the 1665 Great Plague of London. As it happens, blackened flesh is not a symptom of the particular plague that we call Black Death.

Sources Information supplied by FT's Sweden correspondent Sven Rosén, referring to *Stora Döden* by Dick Harrison (Ordfront, 2000); www.museumoflondon.org.uk/MOLsite/learning/features_facts/viking_2.html; www3.shropshire-cc.gov.uk/roots/packages/med/med_d01.htm; www.freeessays.cc/db/26/hsz232.shtml

Disclaimer As a non-Latin-speaking, non-scientific, non-historian, I will be both delighted and unsurprised to read vigorous rebuttals of all of the above in a future letters column.

Mythchaser

A reader wants to know whether any gangster has ever actually found himself concretely entombed during the construction of a British motorway bridge. If you know, please send us a message we can't fail to understand.



HUNT EMERSON



archæology

Neil Mortimer and Paul Sieveking find what may be an ancient landscape picture; sexual statuary in Saxony; Roman rabbit remains, plus the Great Wall of China photographed from space.

Earliest landscape?



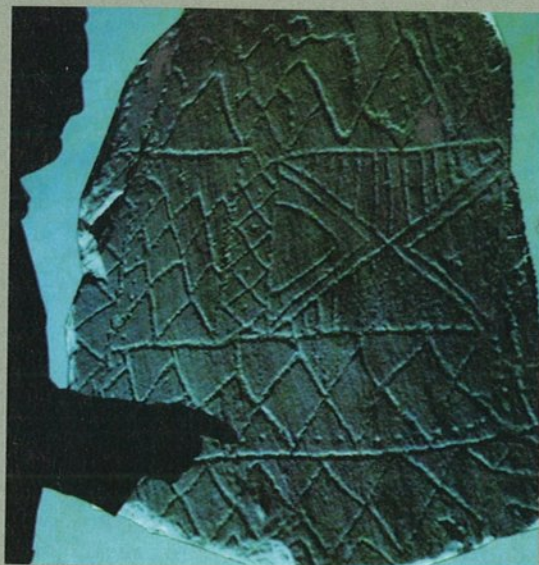
EMPICS / PA / GARETH COPLEY

A four-day peat fire (above) in September 2003 exposed about a square mile (2.6sq km) of subsoil on Fylingdales Moor, near Ravenscar, North Yorkshire. The following April, National Parks Authority officials noticed an inscribed sandstone slab half buried in ash. Measuring 100x80cm (39x31in) and 20cm (8in) thick, it was decorated with linked triangles and lozenge shapes, dots and hatched areas. It is estimated to be 4,000 years old, presumably by associated finds. Almost 2,500 artefacts ranging from Stone Age arrowheads to bullets used in World War II exercises were unearthed.

When the stone slab was photographed with a laser scanner by Archaeoptics Ltd, the patterns became clearer. A press release by English Heritage suggested that these could be interpreted as a landscape. Across the 'top' are a series of jagged peaks or waves with undulating lines like clouds above them. Below are a series of interconnecting lines, resembling field boundaries, a series of triangles to the right in a cross shape and what could be a hut with an extra triangle representing the doorway. Graham Chappell, writing in *Northern Earth* magazine, thought this explanation too simplistic: "[A] cursory glance at similar compositions in other cultures shows that such designs can

incorporate many levels of symbolism and have a deep spiritual significance to the people who created them."

English Heritage has reburied the stone on the moor, drawing criticism from archaeologists who wanted it displayed locally. Similar to local sandstone, it is not thought to have been in its original location and may have been either dumped or re-used, so the reburial seems to make little sense. About 200 stones incised with the more usual cup-and-ring motif (small circular depressions and circles) have been found in the Fylingdales Moor area, but the slab design appears to be unique in Britain. It bears some similarity to patterns on late Neolithic beaker pottery and some Passage Grave art. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 21 Dec 2004; Northern Earth #101, Spring 2005.*



EMPICS / PA / JOHN GILES

ANCIENT PORN: MODERN COBBLERS

The discovery in Germany recently of two 7,200-year-old clay figurines possibly portraying a man and woman having sex was greeted with much excitement, and more than a little prurience, by the British media. The 3in (8cm) figurines were found during an excavation in Saxony being carried out by the Archaeological Institute of Saxony, based in Dresden. The damaged remains of the male half of the clay couple were recovered first, followed by fragments of his female counterpart one month later. According to the Institute's Dr Harald Stäuble, the male figure is "bent forward, and the female figure is bent forward even more. There are two ways of looking at this. The first is that they were doing a ritual dance, but the other possibility is that the man and woman were copulating and that he was standing behind her. The copulation option is far more likely, and would make this the oldest representation ever of a pornographic scene. This is such an interesting discovery, as these figurines are not stylistic, but realistic. They open up a gateway for historians and anthropologists to discuss whether sex really was a taboo subject in the Stone Age." Your correspondent is puzzled. What evidence is there that sex was considered taboo in the Stone Age? And presuming that the figurines do show a copulating couple – and for the time being we have to take Dr Stäuble's word for it because so far no images of the figurines have been released – what makes them pornographic? *Guardian, 4 April 2005; and widely reported elsewhere.*

ROMAN RABBIT RUN

The widely held notion that rabbits were introduced into the British Isles no earlier than the 12th century has apparently been disproved by the discovery of a rabbit skeleton in a Roman context, at Lynford, Norfolk. The remains of the 2,000-year-old rabbit were found in 2002 during an excavation of an early Roman settlement, but the find was not identified fully until the end of 2004. "We know that the rabbit remains are from the early Roman period because pieces of pottery found within the pit date from the first century and the site was undisturbed. The bones themselves had been butchered; possibly the rabbit was to be eaten by a Roman, and then buried on the site. We believe we have convincing evidence that these rabbit remains could be the earliest known in Britain," said Jane Bowen, manager of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit.

Marcus Terrentius Varro (116-27BC) wrote that the Roman legions disseminated rabbits from Spain, where they were reared in walled enclosures and served up as a gourmet dish. Following the news report of the Roman rabbit, archaeologist Mark Roberts pointed out that rabbit remains were recovered from his excavations at Boxgrove in West Sussex, dating back half a million years, but "there is no evidence that they formed part of Boxgrove Man's diet. He and his friends preferred rhino meat whenever they could get it." *BBC News, 13 April; D.Telegraph, 14+15 April 2005.*



NASA

DON'T LOOK DOWN

Legend has it that The Great Wall of China is the sole manmade object visible from the Moon, so when Chinese astronaut Yang Liwei reported last year that the Great Wall was not even visible from space in low Earth orbit, it seemed that one of the great space-based popular myths had been laid to rest.

However, photographs taken on 24 November 2004 and 20 February 2005 by Leroy Chiao, commander and NASA science officer aboard the International Space Station, have shown that sections of the Great Wall situated in Inner Mongolia, about 200 miles (320km) north of Beijing, are indeed visible from space. Other man-made structures visible from outside the Earth's atmosphere include cities, major roadways, bridges, airports, dams and reservoirs, but despite the enormous length of the Great Wall, it is difficult to see and photograph – it is rather narrow and the material from which it is made is the same colour and texture as the area surrounding it.

Kamlesh P Lulla, NASA's chief scientist for Earth observation at Johnson Space Center in Houston, said: "The interpretation of this [24 November] ISS photo seems to be good. It appears that the right set of conditions must have occurred for this photograph to capture the small segment of the wall. It was a sunny day and a recent snowfall had helped make the wall more visible." NASA website, 9 May 2005.



NASA



NASA

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD
COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

64. THE NAKED TRUTH

"If there never has been a natural explanation of anything, everything is, naturally enough, the supernatural" – Fort, *Books*, p655.

FT190:8 reports female rice farmers in India and Nepal ploughing in the nude to persuade rain god Indra to accelerate the monsoon – it worked.

This bare fact (a Greek expression – Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Art of Rhetoric*, ch10 para6) both enhances and is enhanced by a couple of ancient poets. Hesiod (*Works & Days*, vv391-2) deposes: "Strip to sow, strip to plough, strip to reap," Latinised by Virgil, *Georgic* 1, v299. Hesiod's adjective is 'gymnos' (whence 'gymnasium'), Virgil's 'nudus'. At school, we were solemnly assured that they did not really mean 'nude', but 'wearing a single garment'. Yeah, right.

A 'Victorian value', obviously, insisted upon by (e.g.) JEB Mayor (1881) in his note on Juvenal, *Satire* 4, v49. But, his contemporary TE Page (1898), writing on the Virgil passage, scorns the notion, emphasising the word must be taken literally. True, Mayor produced a single ancient Virgil commentator who gave 'nudus' the toned-down sense. However, Suetonius (*Life of Virgil*, ch44) mentions a Roman wag who capped his advice with the verse-ending 'habebis frigore febrem' – "You'll catch your death of cold." As Page remarks, "the story has no point if 'nudus' means what editors desire."

Given all the protrusions from ancient ploughs, fully described by our two poets, I'd not fancy working one *en deshabillé* – its dangly bits might meet mine, with unfortunate consequences.

The bowdlerisers ignore other ancient evidence, artistic and literary. Illustrations in ASF Gow's 'The Ancient Plough,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol34, 1914, pp49-75, show naked ploughmen. A character in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, v1173, proclaims "I want to undress and get back naked to my farming." When called from his plough to save Rome, Cincinnatus (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk18 ch4 para20) is 'nudus' and told 'vela corpus' – "Cover up your body." Plutarch (*Life of the Elder Cato*, ch3) asserts that this most Roman of Romans farmed 'gymnos' in summer.

One ancient commentator on Hesiod had a practical explanation: "Work without your cloak so that it will not tangle you up." However, despite Arthur Fallowfield in *Round The Horne*, the answer may lie not in the soil, but higher up. The best modern writer, KD White, *Roman Farming* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1970, p471n2), whilst ignoring our topic, stresses the preponderance of magical formulæ in ancient agricultural writers: "They reflect the farmer's reliance on supernatural aid in an operation where success or failure seemed to occur through the working of arbitrary forces."

Hesiod's most distinguished editor, ML West (Oxford, 1978, p258) thinks "perhaps originally there was a religious basis to the rule." Hesiod and Virgil both issue their bare instructions in the named context of Ceres/Demeter, the goddess of fertility who (*Homeric Hymn* 2, vv273-4 & 470-82) demands both cultural and agricultural rituals in her service. Hesiod's father was a peasant immigrant from Asia Minor; he might well have imported native religious notions. Athenæus (*Learned Men at Dinner*, bk14 para631d) alludes to boys dancing naked to encourage a grape-laden vintage. Petronius (*Satyricon*, ch44 para18) tells how women went barefoot into the fields to pray to Jupiter for rain – "It did so in bucketfuls, they came home soaked." Finally, Pliny (bk18 ch35 para31) says the best turnips occur when their seed is ploughed in between the festivals of Neptune and Vulcan by a farmer who goes 'nudus' with the prayer "I sow for myself and my neighbours" – Quite a turnip for the book.

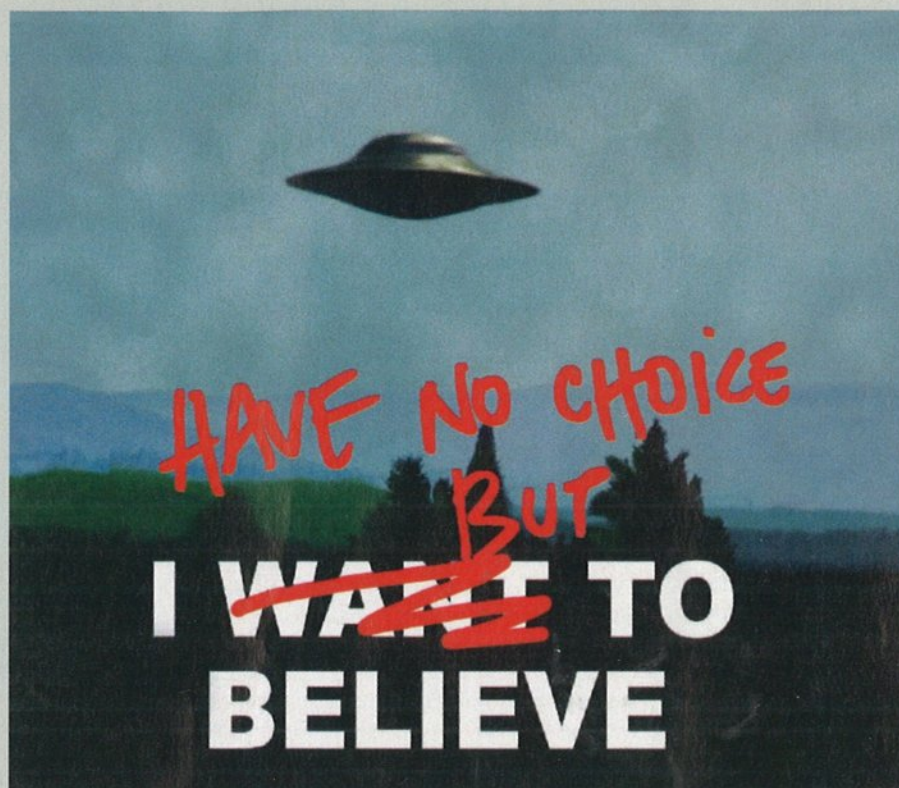
Largely for fun, I Googled 'Nude Farming' and was given 225,000 sites – I couldn't be (bare)arsed to plough through them, but(t)...



medical bag

Our basic beliefs may be linked to gender, personality and vocation, says PAUL CHAMBERS. FT is forced to take it with a pinch of salt.

I want to believe...



One of the iconic images to emerge from the television series *The X-Files* was the poster in Mulder's office depicting a hovering UFO beneath which was written the phrase: "I want to believe". In light of some recent research concerning the nature of belief in the paranormal, perhaps the poster should have read: "I have no choice but to believe".

In the last 20 years, many commentators have observed that despite increased scientific awareness and a decline in church-going, levels of belief in superstitious and paranormal topics has at best remained relatively steady and in some fields, such as alternative medicine, has greatly increased. There could be any number of reasons for this (disillusionment with the establishment, poor public promotion of science, media sensationalism, etc.) but one of the more interesting theories is that an interest in the paranormal is not a matter of free will but is instead biologically pre-programmed in many of us. This was first raised as the result of questionnaire surveys (usually conducted on students) that investigated whether certain people were more likely than others to hold strong beliefs in paranormal subjects.

In general such surveys found that there

Creative people are more likely to believe in the paranormal

was no sexual divide in paranormal belief: men and women are equally likely to believe. A person's age is also irrelevant. A person's profession does have a bearing – creative people (such as artists and architects) being more likely to believe while biologists and medics were the most sceptical.¹ Perhaps more surprising is the link between professional sportsmen and women and paranormal belief, something that apparently manifests itself in the large number of superstitious routines and lucky mascots on which such athletes rely.² Less unexpected is the strong link between personal religious belief and the paranormal.³ Belief in the paranormal has also been linked to psychiatric factors, with the children of alcoholics,

obsessive-compulsives, manic-depressives and narcissists all likely to be believers.⁴ A strong correlation is also seen in people with lower cognitive ability and those with limited reasoning skills.⁵

Such surveys might help to identify the sort of person who is liable to hold paranormal beliefs, but they rarely dig deeper than this. In recent years, advances in the ability to measure and map the brain's functions have led to some biologically-based explanations being put forward.

One of the most controversial is the idea that the hemispheres of the brain might influence paranormal belief. In particular, there has been a lively discussion as to whether those people who predominantly use their brain's right hemisphere rather than their left are more likely to be superstitious, paranoid and pro-paranormal. Some studies of EEG brain patterns have found a marked link between right-brainers and paranormal belief. One explanation for this is that those who overly rely on their right hemisphere don't have as high a level of reasoning as others and that this makes it more likely that they will interpret chance and coincidental events as having a paranormal cause. They also note that believers in the paranormal have brain-use patterns that are similar to those of schizophrenics.⁶ Some researchers (e.g. notably Michael Persinger) tie in this right-hemisphere imbalance with the brain's temporal lobe, a region that is thought to generate religious and mystical experiences in some people.⁷

So, at the end of this dazzling array of surveys and opinions, are we really able to state with certainty that the paranormal is something that many of us are born to believe in? Some of these surveys contradict one another – perhaps not surprising considering how small their sample populations are (often fewer than a dozen people). Even so, the link between obsessive paranormal belief and certain more extreme psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, is well established. However, given how widespread interest in the paranormal is, I suspect for most people it is no more pre-determined than other hobbies such as stamp-collecting or bird-watching.

NOTES

1 *Journal of Psychology*, vol.126, pp.521-8, 1992.

2 *Psychological Reports*, vol.94, pp.1043-7, 2004.

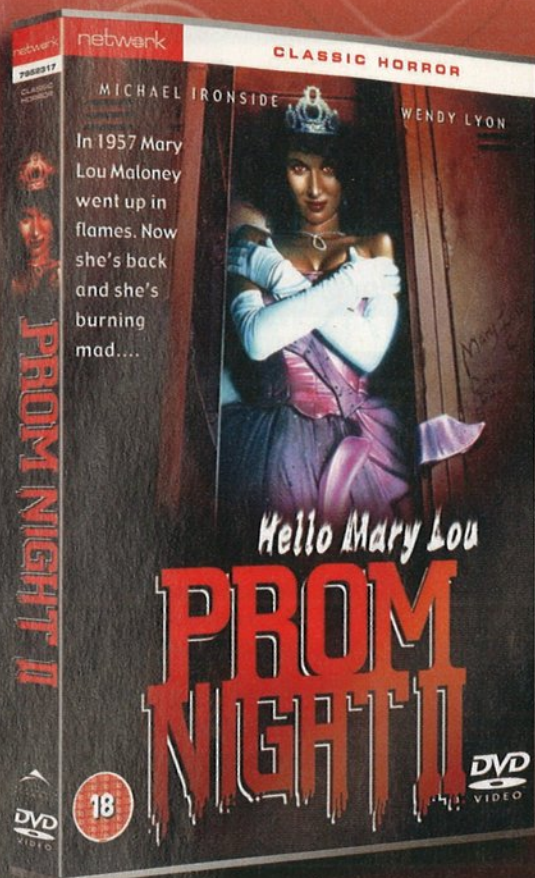
3 *Journal General Psychology*, vol.130, pp.431-45, 2003.

4 *Psychological Reports*, vol.74, pp.107-111, 1994; vol.29, pp.17-23, 1990; vol.91, pp.1065-73, 2002; *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol.18, pp.291-92, 1995. *Journal of American Normal Development of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol.29, pp.17-23, 1990.

5 *British Journal of Psychology*, vol.93, pp.169-77, 2002.

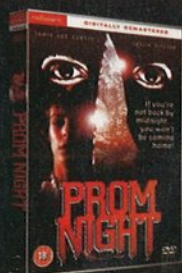
6 *Psychiatry Research*, vol.100, pp.139-54, 2000; *Psychopathology*, vol.34, pp.75-80, 2001.

7 See, for example, *Percept and Motor Skills*, vol.76, pp.247-51, 1993. Also FT71:32.



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Fortean follow-ups

We report on further developments in stories from previous issues of *Fortean Times*



ART FOR THE MASSES [FT185:10]



The graffiti artist known as Banksy (believed to be Robert Banks, aged about 30, from Bristol) has infiltrated further temples of culture

with his witty artworks. On 13 March he was in New York, where the Brooklyn Museum gained a portrait of a colonial-era soldier holding an aerosol can and standing in front of anti-war graffiti. Into the Museum of Modern Art he smuggled a Warhol-style print of a can of Tesco 'value' tomato soup, while the Metropolitan Museum of Art was left with a small, gold-framed portrait of a woman wearing a gas mask. In the Museum of Natural History he hung a glass-encased beetle modified with jet fighter wings, missiles and a satellite dish. "It was just an outsider's view of the modern American bug, bristling with listening devices and military hardware," he explained later.

Banksy, wearing an overcoat, hat, false beard and false nose, glued the works to the walls, helped by accomplices who filmed him and provided distractions where necessary. Once "they staged a gay tiff, shouting very loudly and obnoxiously," he said. The Met discovered their new painting "within minutes" of it being hung in the American wing, but it took the Brooklyn until 16 March and Moma until 17 March to find and remove their unscheduled additions.

On 16 May, a work called "Early Man Goes to Market" appeared in the British Museum's Roman Britain gallery. Painted on a piece of rubble 10x6in (25x15cm) from Peckham, south London, it showed a caveman pushing a supermarket trolley in front of a speared bison. (In fact, such trolleys were invented in 1937 by Sylvan N Goldman, an Oklahoma City supermarket owner – see *Felton & Fowler's Famous Americans You Never Knew Existed*, Stein and Day, NY, 1979, pp.103-106.)

Beside the artwork was a caption stating: "This finely preserved

example of primitive art dates from the Post-Catatonian era and is thought to depict early man venturing towards the out-of-town hunting grounds. The artist responsible is known to have created a substantial body of work across South East of England under the moniker Banksymus Maximus, but little else is known about him. Most art of this type has unfortunately not survived. The majority is destroyed by zealous municipal officials who fail to recognise the artistic merit and historical value of daubing on walls."

Banksy announced on his website on 18 May that "Early Man" had "remained in the collection [the BM] for quite some time". Alerted, museum staff took about three hours to locate the work stuck to a wall in Gallery 49 with double-sided tape, beneath a first-century limestone funerary statue tombstone found in Tower Hill and a case full of statuettes from Roman Britain. It was lent for Banksy's new show at the Outside Institute in central London, which opened on 20

GALLERY GALL: Banksy's *Early Man Goes To Market* in the British Museum.

May, after which it will be returned to the British Museum, which has agreed to include it in its permanent collection. [R] 24 Mar; *Guardian*, 26 Mar; *NY Times*, 31 Mar; [PA] *BBC News*, *D.Telegraph*, 19 May; *D.Express*, 20 May; *Independent on Sunday*, 29 May 2005.

FISHY CURE FOR WHEEZERS [FT102:15]



Every June, thousands of asthma sufferers flock to Hyderabad in Andra Pradesh, southern India, to take the "fish medicine" prepared by the Bathini Goud family. Concocted from a secret herbal recipe and inserted into the mouth of a live murel fish, the medicine is dropped, wriggling, into the mouth of the patient who must then swallow it, fish and all, whole and alive. Patients are advised to abstain from alcohol, caffeine, tobacco and deep-fried food for 45 days and to repeat the treatment for at least two successive years. Although thousands swear by its efficacy – 75,000 people turned up



SAVITA KIRLOSKAR/REUTERS

to swallow the fish in 2004 – India's medical authorities have mounted a campaign to persuade the masses it is nothing but a trick. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has also filed a court application to force its creators either to reveal its contents as required under Indian law – or admit that it is not a "medicine".

According to tradition, a Himalayan saint revealed the wonder cure to Bathini Veeranna Goud in 1845, in gratitude for getting dry clothes and food on a rainy day. One version maintains that he blessed the family's well. Today, the three surviving Goud brothers still prepare the "miracle medicine" using the blessed well water. They are not in it for the money: patients are charged a few pence, which fails to cover the cost of preparing the herbs and fish. They refuse to divulge the secret, for fear it will be exploited for profit. Officials of the IMA, however, are sceptical, particularly since laboratory tests on the fish revealed heavy metals, mercury and steroids. These, they say, can cause impotence and lead to intestinal and bone marrow damage in addition to other diseases. In some cases, they maintain, it can aggravate the medical condition of asthma patients. The Goud family dismissed the IMA's claims. *BBC News*, 26 May; *D.Telegraph*, 10 June 2005.

CURING FISH: An asthma sufferer partakes of the "fish medicine".



Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

MOSCOW POLICE BROKE INTO THE FLAT of the Komarov family in Artyukhino Road in the south-west of the city after complaints that they had not paid their utility bills for months. They found the mummified bodies of a man and three women. The flat was full of icons and Russian Orthodox devotional literature. There was no sign of a disturbance. An initial examination showed that the owner of the flat, Timofie Komarov, born in 1912, had died about 10 years ago. His body was found on a bed, a calendar above his head opened on the year 1997. His wife, Anna Komarova, born in 1914, was found in a separate room, also on a bed. She had died at least three years ago. Their daughter, Alla Ivkina, born in 1942, and her daughter Anna Ivkina, born in 1971, lay in the kitchen. These two had died about two years ago.

"As the bodies are mummified," said Sergei Marchenko, a spokesman for the Moscow prosecutor's office, "it is impossible [immediately] to determine the cause of death. We will be able to speak about this after the chemical and DNA tests [sic] on the remains." A source close to the investigation told the RIA Novosti news agency that the family could have been part of a "non-established sect" that "poisoned themselves during a ritual". The source said that two bottles containing a dark residue had been found and were being tested. *Guardian*, 9 June 2005.

A COMPUTER GAME PLAYER IN CHINA HAS killed another player over a weapon that existed only in cyberspace. The "Dragon Sabre" was won as part of a game called *Legend of Mir III* by Qui Chengwei, 41, from Shanghai. After winning it, players can use it to kill more characters or, as Qiu did, lend it to another player. Qiu lent the sword to Zhu Caoyuan, 26, who sold it for 7,200 yuan (just over £500), five times the average monthly income in Shanghai. When Qiu found out, he took the argument into the physical world, reporting it as a theft – but the police claimed they could do nothing as the property was merely virtual.

As the columnist Sam Leith pointed out: "If you think about this in the context of, for example, fraud or intellectual property, both of which are covered by the law, you'll see the police weren't thinking too hard about the nature of their remit." Qiu then broke into

Zhu's house and stabbed him in the chest. He was given a suspended death sentence, meaning his execution will be commuted to life if he behaves well for the next two years. However, Zhu's father, Zhu Huimin, said: "We want Qiu to die, and immediately." *D.Telegraph*, 9+18 June; *Metro*, 9 June 2005.

PAM HEARNE HEARD A TERRIFIC BANG outside her house in Floral Park, Long Island, New York, at 6.50am on 7 June, but thought it was a neighbour loading a van with furniture. She left for work at 8.30am and it wasn't until she returned home at 10.30am that she noticed a charred human hip, spine and leg with a white Adidas sneaker on the foot lying on the grass in her back yard. It had smashed into her garage roof from the wheel well of a South African Airways jet preparing to land after a flight from Johannesburg via Dakar, Senegal. Apparently, a stowaway was crushed as the jet lowered its landing gear on its approach to New York's Kennedy Airport, about five miles (8km) away. The other leg was found hanging from the left wheel well. The pilot had felt some unusual

vibrations after taking off from Dakar, but a diagnostic check turned up nothing unusual. *[AP]* *NY Post*, *NY Daily News*, 8 June 2005.

GARETH MASON, 22, RETURNED TO HIS FIRST floor flat in Aberystwyth, South Wales, with his rugby teammates after a pub-crawl. When someone mentioned girls, he dropped his trousers and waddled to the open window, eating a kebab and yelling, "Who wants some of this?" He then lost his balance, impaled his neck and chest on railings below, and died of blood loss. Ceredigion Coroner's Court heard that he had four times the legal drink-drive limit of alcohol in his blood. *Metro*, 14 April; *D.Mirror*, 15 April 2005.

POLICE IN LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, TRIED to pull over Rogelio Davis, 34, for driving 50mph (80km/h) in a 30mph (48km/h) zone in Wheatley Heights. He sped off, collided with another car, and became airborne, clearing an 8ft (2.4m) fence at the Long Island National Cemetery and knocking over eight headstones. He died in the cemetery. *NY Post*, 27 May 2005.



TERRY COLON

BRITAIN'S X-FILES



06. The Welsh Triangle

The West Wales flap of 1977 is second only to the Warminster "Thing" in British UFO history. Documents released in 2005 have revealed how a secret military investigation was launched into claims that alien craft and their tall humanoid occupants were taking a particular interest in the Welsh coastline. **DAVID CLARKE** investigates.

The death in 2003 of veteran Welsh ufologist Randall Jones Pugh passed without notice within the modern British UFO community. But less than three decades ago, Pugh, a retired vet, was a leading spokesman for the subject and the key promoter of Britain's hottest new UFO "flap". This was focused upon a strip of rugged coastline within the Pembroke National Park near Pugh's home, which became, for a short time in 1977, the scene of strange encounters and made national headlines.

Earlier in the year Pugh, in an interview for a local paper, discussed sightings in 1976 and predicted there would soon be a spate of similar events in west Wales. But even he was not prepared for what happened next. During lunchtime on 4 February, 15 schoolchildren at Broad Haven Primary School said they watched a silver cigar-shaped UFO in fields behind their school. Some of the group, aged from nine to 11 years, claimed they saw a silver man with pointed ears emerge from the craft. Their stories were dismissed as fantasy, but the children were so adamant they had seen something unusual they handed in a petition to the police station. Their head teacher later asked them to draw the UFO and was amazed at how similar their pictures were.

Randall Pugh was instrumental in bringing the story to the attention of the media and it became an overnight sensation. Journalists and TV crews flocked to the Welsh coast from all corners of the UK. Flying saucers were soon the main topic of conversation in the principality.

By May, straightforward lights in the sky had been replaced by stories of

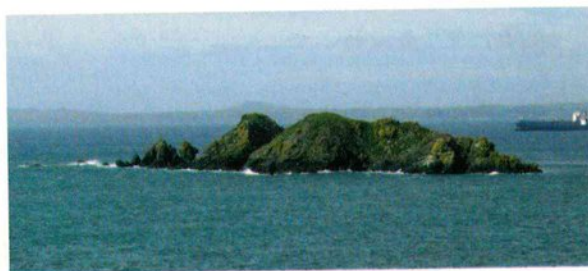
giant humanoid figures in spacesuits, similar to those used by astronauts, seen prowling around remote countryside late at night.

A whole gamut of fortan phenomena appeared to cluster around the Coombs family at Ripperston Farm. Here a dairyman, Billy Coombs, his wife Pauline and their five children told of repeated close encounters with UFOs and their occupants which left a trail of burned-out cars and TV sets and spiralling electricity bills.

Pauline had a sighting almost every month and on one occasion the car in which she was driving her children along a country lane was pursued by a fiery object shaped like a rugby football. Later, the couple claimed a herd of cows were inexplicably teleported from a locked field to an adjacent farmyard. But the most terrifying incident of all happened

BELOW: Stack Rocks, St Bride's Bay, which, it was claimed, hid a UFO base.

BOTTOM: Pauline Coombs with daughters Layann and Joanne at the window where a giant glowing silver figure observed the family. The wall around the window was badly scorched and repainting attempts failed. The immediate area was later found to contain traces of radiation.



in the early hours of 23 April as the couple watched a late movie. Suddenly they were terrified by the appearance of a 7ft-(2.1m-) tall figure in a spacesuit, whose blank face was framed in the window of their sitting room. While later investigators were sceptical of some of the more sensational claims, others were impressed by the genuine terror displayed by the couple at the time. Indeed, the policeman who responded to their 999 call said in 1996 that in all his 26 years service "that was the most frightened family I have ever been to see". There was no doubt the couple had seen something unusual – but what?

The weird events at Ripperston Farm were chronicled in three books, one of which, *The Welsh Triangle* by Peter Paget (1979) had been partly inspired by *The Sun* headline "Spaceman Mystery of the Terror Triangle." What exactly constituted the Welsh version of the Bermuda Triangle was never entirely clear, but it included most of the southeast corner of St Bride's Bay along with the towns of Milford Haven and Haverfordwest. The third and last book to chronicle the Welsh weirdness was *The Dyfed Enigma*, produced by Pugh in collaboration with cryptozoologist FW Holliday, which linked the UFO stories with Welsh fairy folklore and leys.

Journalist Hugh Turnbull, who chronicled the events for the local weekly, *Western Telegraph*, told me his pet theory was that "something military" lay behind the sightings. A more extreme version, favoured by Paget, was that aliens had established an underground base beneath the Stack Rocks in St Bride's Bay, where UFOs had been seen to hover and disappear. This form of speculation – shared by some local people – was founded on the fact that within a 20-mile (32km) radius of Broad Haven, where many of the reports were concentrated, there was a range of military bases. To the north was the top secret rocket testing station at Aberporth while Brawdy, near St David's, trained pilots on Hawker Hunters and housed both a Tactical Weapons Unit and a US Navy underwater research station – in reality a unit which tracked the movements of Soviet submarines using a network of microphones.

RAF Squadron Leader Tim Webb, who oversaw pilot training from the base, said the description of the suits worn by the "spacemen" did not match anything used by base personnel. By a curious coincidence, Webb's son Michael happened to be one of the youngsters who claimed they saw a UFO land behind the primary school at Broad Haven. "I believe him implicitly," Webb told *The Observer* at the time. "I've yet to see a UFO but I think there has to be



ABOVE: Ripperston Farm, where the Coombs family lived.

She saw an oval brightly lit UFO and two figures

something supernatural or paranormal." Heady words for an RAF spokesman who would normally be expected to debunk sightings of flying saucers.

Meanwhile, demands were increasing for an official inquiry into the west Wales UFOs. One witness, hotelier Rosa Granville, asked her MP, Nicholas Edwards – later to become Welsh Secretary in Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet – to demand answers from the Ministry of Defence. Mrs Granville ran the Haven Fort Hotel which stands in a dramatic location overlooking St Bride's Bay. Although she was aware of a legend about a 'white lady' ghost haunting the grounds, this did not prepare her for the events of 19 April 1977. In the early hours of that morning, Mrs Granville was disturbed by a strange buzzing noise and, on looking out, saw an oval, brightly lit UFO and two human-like figures in boiler suits that appeared to be measuring something. The following day, she found a flattened area of grass in the area which, it emerged, overlooked a field which contained a bunker used by the Royal Observer Corps.

Within days of the MP's intervention, a Squadron Leader from RAF Brawdy visited the hotel to interview the

owners. According to their account, he told them there was "absolutely nothing at RAF Brawdy" that could account for the UFO. And, Mrs Granville claimed, "he asked me not to say anything about the incident to anyone, as he thought it was best not to alarm the general public." However, in his reply to the MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Defence James Wellbeloved said that apart from Mrs Granville's report the MOD had "no record of unusual activity in the area."

But behind the public platitudes it seems a discreet investigation was indeed going on, hidden even from the politicians. For on 14 June 1977 the head of S4 (Air), the MoD branch which dealt with UFOs, took the unusual step of asking the RAF Police, in the form of the Provost & Security Service (P&SS) to make a "discreet enquiry" into the events. The P&SS is responsible for policing the RAF and has a section which investigates complaints about low-flying aircraft. Early in 1977 it moved to a secretive facility deep in the Wiltshire countryside called RAF Rudloe Manor. UFO authors Tim Good and Nick Redfern have claimed that Rudloe – rather than the UFO desk in Whitehall – has for many years been the *real* HQ for the British Government's UFO taskforce.

The papers released this year throw new light on claims of a conspiracy involving Rudloe Manor. While they do support the claim that P&SS was involved in secret UFO work, they suggest it was hardly its main priority. In their letter to P&SS the MOD wrote: "We have not invoked the assistance of P&SS before on UFOs... and the last thing I want to do is involve you in extraneous problems which would divert you from your more immediate

work on low flying complaints." It goes on to ask them to assess "the volume of local interest and/or alarm and whether there is a readily discernable rational explanation, or whether there is *prima facie* evidence for a more serious specialist enquiry." And the writer went to some length to emphasise his request must be treated in confidence, adding: "I have not even told the Minister I am consulting you."

Due to the covert nature of the investigation, no final report on the P&SS investigation of events in the Welsh Triangle has survived. But in December 1977, in a secret briefing on UFO policy submitted to the MOD's Defence Intelligence Staff, the head of S4 wrote: "There is always a steady public interest in UFOs and from time to time it tends to increase unaccountably... [in the summer] there was some concern in Wales, although the RAF Police thought this could have been the work of a practical joker."

The fact that inquiries led the RAF Police to suspect a hoaxer may have been responsible for some of the Welsh UFOs fits with a strong local rumour which persists to this day. Hilary Evans, who debunked some of the more exaggerated stories in an article published in 1982, heard that two members of a round table club were responsible for the sightings of "spacemen" at the Haven Fort Hotel and Ripperston Farm. They came up with the idea after borrowing silver-lined asbestos suits worn by local oil refinery workers for a fancy dress evening in Broad Haven shortly after the children's sighting.

In 1996, BBC presenter Ray Gosling tracked down one of the jokers for a Radio 4 documentary on the west Wales flap. Shortly afterwards, Glyn Edwards, a member of Milford Haven's Round Table, confessed his part to the *Western Mail*. He described the spaceman outfit as having: "... a solid in-built helmet so I would have looked about 7ft (2.1m) tall. Alien sightings were all the rage, so I took a stroll around for a bit of fun. I remember when I visited the garden of a certain lady, who later called the police, that I had to dive into a hedge because she appeared to be aiming a rifle or a shotgun at me."

But despite all Gosling's attempts to persuade the witnesses from Broad Haven school to confess, the boys – now in their forties – stuck doggedly by their story. One of them, David Davies, told him: "I did see something unexplained that day and I will stick to that story for the rest of my life."

The Welsh Triangle may hold onto its secrets for some years to come. **FT**

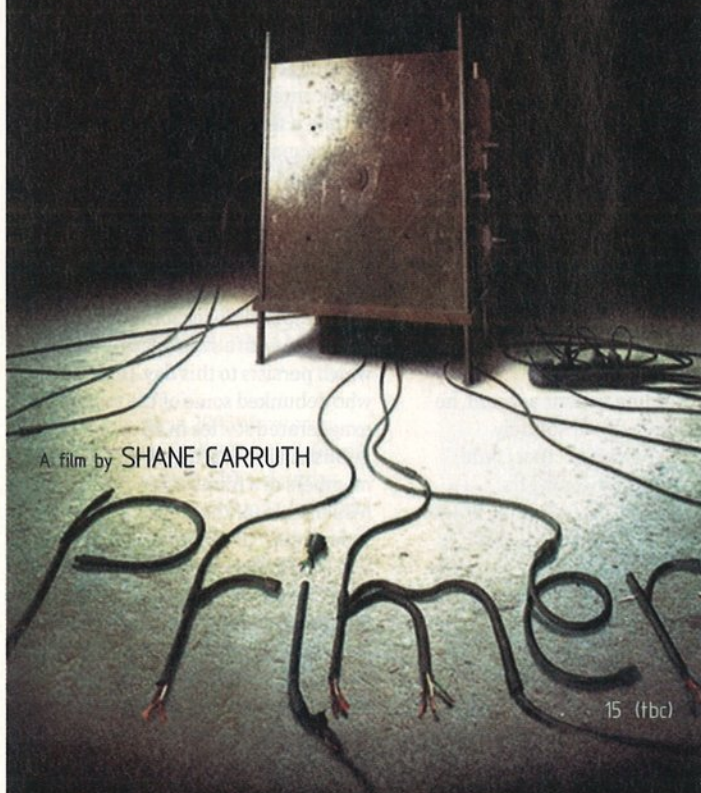


DR DAVID CLARKE teaches a course on supernatural belief at the Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield. He is a frequent FT contributor and columnist.

DR DAVID CLARKE

"THE HEADIEST, MOST
SINGULAR SCIENCE-FICTION
MOVIE SINCE
KUBRICK MADE 2001"

ESQUIRE



A film by SHANE CARRUTH

15 (fbc)



GQ

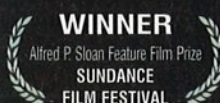
"ENIGMATIC... A
METAPHYSICAL MINDFUCKER"



UNCUT



TOTAL FILM



WINNER

Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize
SUNDANCE
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WINNER

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THE FORTEAN TIMES GUIDE TO THE WEIRD UK

**BEING A GAZETTEER OF
THE ODDITIES AND
ANOMALIES OF A
STRANGE COUNTRY,
FROM THE GHOSTS
OF ASTLEY CASTLE
TO THE MERMAID
OF ZENNOR
COVE**

**JOHANNAN DOWNES, DAVID SUTTON,
LIONEL FANTHORPE,
KARL SHUKER, JANET
BORD, GAIL-NINA
ANDERSON,
GORDON RUTTER
AND JOE MCNALLY
ARE YOUR GUIDES**

MAP AND ALL ACCOMPANYING
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JONATHAN BURTON

THE WEST COUNTRY



JONATHAN DOWNES IS YOUR GUIDE

The West Country is a strange and ancient place. Indeed, it seems to me that the further west one travels the stranger it gets. My old friend Tony "Doc" Shiels once told me that Cornwall (although it hasn't been a separate Kingdom for centuries), isn't really a part of England, and it is hard to disagree with him. I have lived in Devon for 35 years or so, and have been collecting stories about the West Country's odder places ever since my father first told me the folk tales of Dartmoor during a holiday there during the long, hot summer of 1969.



1 ST. NECTAN'S CHURCH, STOKE, HARTLAND, NORTH DEVON

Often referred to as the 'Cathedral of North Devon', St Nectan's is believed to date from 1360; it replaced an earlier church (c. 1170) on the same site, of which only the font remains. Outside the church is an ancient tree with a story of its own. Nectan sailed south from Wales and landed on the Cornwall-Devon border at Hartland Point. Nearby, he found a beautiful valley, with a never-failing spring. He built a little church and a hermitage and lived there for many years. Nectan tended to the needs of the poor throughout Devon, Cornwall and even Brittany, where

FOTEAAN PICTURE LIBRARY / JANET & COLIN BORD



MAWNAN OLD CHURCH

churches dedicated to him may be found. He once helped a swineherd find his lost pigs and, in return, was given two cows to provide milk.

One day, when Nectan's two cows were stolen, he tracked the bandits to New Stoke and tried to convert them to Christianity, whereupon they beheaded him. Legend says that Nectan picked up his severed head and returned with it to his chapel at Stoke, where the tree was planted to commemorate the event on 17 June AD 510.

HAUNTED PUBS

14 THE GEORGE & PILGRIM

Serving pilgrims to Glastonbury Abbey since 1475, this lovely old mullion-windowed hostelry is home to a ghostly monk – usually spotted wandering the corridors in the early hours of the morning – and an elegant lady who often seems to be following him, possibly reliving a doomed romance from a previous century.

HIGH STREET, GLASTONBURY, SOMERSET TEL: 01458 831146

2 MAWNAN OLD CHURCH, MAWNAN SMITH, NEAR FALMOUTH, CORNWALL

One of the must-see spots for any forteen tourist exploring the West Country, Mawnan Old Church has been, since 1976, the location of a series of sightings of 'The Owlman of Mawnan', a spectral being, half man/half owl, which has been reported in the churchyard

and the surrounding woods. The most recent sighting of the Owlman took place, allegedly, at the end of the summer of 1995 and is chronicled in a letter sent to the *Western Morning News* in Truro. It reads:

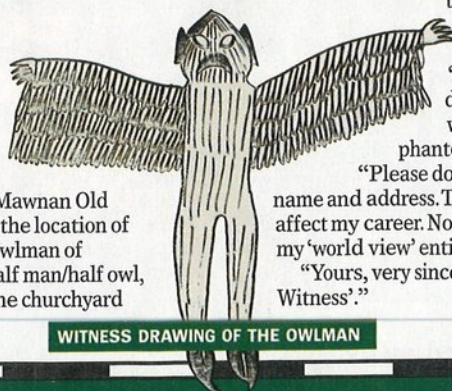
"Dear Sir, I am a student of marine biology at the Field Museum, Chicago, on the last day of a summer vacation in England. Last Sunday evening I had a most unique and frightening experience in the wooded area near the old church at Mawnan, Cornwall. I experienced what I can only describe as 'a vision from hell'. The time was 15 minutes after nine, more or less, and I was walking along a narrow track through the trees. I was halted in my tracks when, about 30 metres [100ft] ahead, I saw a monstrous man-bird 'thing'. It was the size of a man, with a ghastly face, a wide mouth, glowing eyes and pointed ears. It had huge clawed wings, and was covered in feathers of silver/grey colour. The thing had long bird legs which terminated in large black claws. It saw me and arose 'floating' towards me. I just screamed, then turned and ran for my life.

"The whole experience was totally irrational and dreamlike (nightmare!). Friends tell me

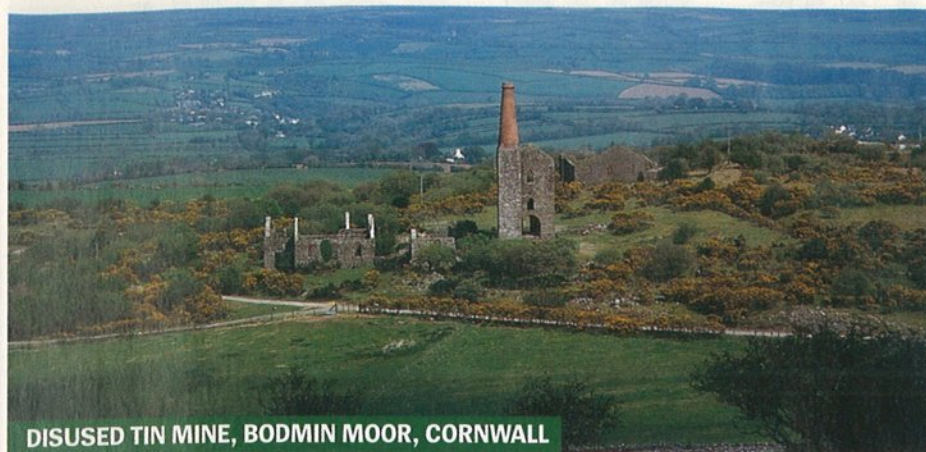
that there is a tradition of a phantom 'owlman' in that district. Now I know why. I have seen the phantom myself.

"Please don't publish my real name and address. This could adversely affect my career. Now I have to rethink my 'world view' entirely.

"Yours, very sincerely scared... 'Eye Witness'."



WITNESS DRAWING OF THE OWLMAN



DISUSED TIN MINE, BODMIN MOOR, CORNWALL

3 CAPEL'S TOMB, BUCKFASTLEIGH OLD CHURCH, DEVON

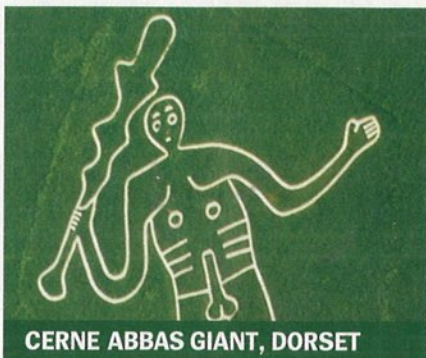
It was my father who first told me about the mysterious Devil's hunting pack – ghostly black hounds that have haunted the wilder parts of Devon since time immemorial – but I learned about Richard Capel, one of the most notorious men ever to live in Devon, from the writings of the county's greatest folklorist, the late Theo Brown. Capel (or Cable) was the Lord of the Manor at Buckfastleigh in the 17th century. Little is known about his life, or indeed about the manner of his death, but his horrific exploits have become the stuff of legend.

Theo Brown wrote: "We know practically nothing about him except that he rebuilt part of his house – the date 1656 is carved over the door – and enjoyed a terrible reputation as a persecutor of village maidens. Having captured one, he would keep her under lock and key across the valley at Hawson Court. He had an unenviable reputation as a violent and powerful squire, and when he came to die in 1677 his end was unpleasant. One legend says he was chased across the moor by a pack of "whisht" hounds until he dropped dead."

Because of his links with the 'left hand path', the local church was unwilling to have him buried in consecrated ground, but as he was the local

landowner and Squire, he couldn't very well be refused. A bizarre compromise was reached, and Capel's remains were interred in a strange pagoda shaped tomb above the ground. Thus, he was laid to rest within the churchyard but not in consecrated ground.

To this day, the village children believe that if you run 13 times around the tomb and then put your finger in the keyhole, Capel's unquiet (but hungry) spirit will nibble at the tip. And ghostly black dogs are still seen processing through the churchyard past the grave of their one-time master.



CERNE ABBAS GIANT, DORSET



SIDELINES

HENHOUSE CHRIST

Christ made an appearance at St Ives, Dorset, in 1976 – on a hen-house wall. A worker at Billsdown farm was the first to notice the mysterious image, which resembled the head and shoulders of a crucified man. Hundreds of visitors flocked to see it.

JELLYFISH UFO

Alastair Mackenzie and family were drinking coffee in their Bournemouth hotel in October 1969 when they noticed a strange jellyfish-shaped object floating over the balcony. It was about five inches across, and glowed and pulsed slightly. After a few moments, the object moved out to sea, maintaining a height of about two feet above the water.



FOX TO VOTE AGAINST BAN ON HUNTING

Bristol Eve. Post, 15 Sep 2004

OLIVER, EIGHT, IS MASTER OF UNIVERSE

Somerset County Gazette, 6 Dec 2002

MORE REGIONAL WEIRDNESS

4 VALLEY OF THE ROCKS, LYNTON, DEVON

Werewolf sightings until the 1990s.

5 OTTERY ST MARY, DEVON

The devil's footprints were seen in the snow on the morning of 9 February 1855 – also as far away as Littlehampton and Totnes.

6 GOLITHA FALLS, CORNWALL

The skull of what was claimed to be the Beast of Bodmin, but which turned out to be part of a moth-eaten leopard skin rug, was found here in 1995.



7 MORWENSTOW, CORNWALL

A great, grey ghostly cat is said to sit on a stone pillar outside the village. When, early in the 20th century, a drunken farm labourer attacked it with a crowbar he was allegedly electrocuted by some unknown force.

8 ZENNOR COVE, CORNWALL

In the local church is a carving commemorating a local fisher-boy who fell in love with a mermaid, with tragic results.

9 BODMIN MOOR, CORNWALL

The ancient tin mines are not only the haunt of many a ghost, but are reputedly home to 'knockers' – earth spirits

who warned miners of impending danger by banging on the walls of unsafe tunnels. Also, there are stories of strange black rabbits, which may be akin to those from Phœnician folklore. The Phœnicians were – after all – the first people to trade tin with the ancient Britons.

10 GLASTONBURY, SOMERSET

Joseph of Arimathea's Holy Thorn, location of the Isle of Avalon, entrance to fairyland, home of occultist Dion Fortune, site of Bligh Bond's 'psychic archaeology' and enough assorted weirdness to keep anyone busy for years...

11 WARMINSTER, WILTSHIRE

From 1964 – when 'The Thing' announced its presence with a loud

whining noise – to 1977, Warminster was the centre of Britain's own UFO circus, presided over by local journalist Arthur Shuttlewood.

12 CERNE ABBAS, DORSET

The priapic, club-wielding chalk giant may turn out to be less ancient than previously thought (or even a dig at Oliver Cromwell from some Dorset wag) but still cuts an, er, impressive figure.

13 SILBURY HILL, WILTSHIRE

Europe's tallest man-made prehistoric mound remains a far greater mystery than the crop circles that now surround it each year: who built it, and for what purpose?



LONDON AND THE SOUTH



DAVID SUTTON IS YOUR GUIDE TO THE REGION

If one phenomenon dominates the southern counties it must be the ghost. From the spectres of Hampton Court Palace and the Tower of London to the less well connected, but equally numerous, phantoms of the otherwise quiet village of Pluckley, Kent – which claims to be England's most haunted – the South East seems to be as overcrowded in death as it is in life. However, other forms of weirdness are plentiful and can be found from London's inner city boroughs to the rural landscapes of the south coast and the Home Counties.

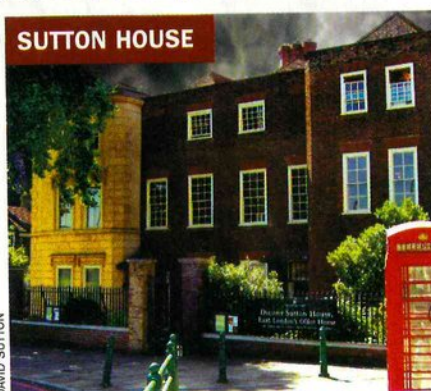


1 HACKNEY, LONDON

Definitely one of the capital's least glamorous boroughs, Hackney makes up in sheer oddness what it lacks in amenities, good looks or charm. *Da Vinci Code* fans can start with the 13th-century, Templar-built Church of St Augustine on Mare Street. Actually, only the tower remains, but there have long been rumours that tunnels run beneath it to Sutton House, the borough's oldest surviving dwelling, dating from 1535. Now in the hands

of the National Trust (one struggles to imagine them coping with inner city Hackney – cup of Darjeeling and a scone, anyone?),

SUTTON HOUSE



Sutton House has been lovingly restored but remains stubbornly haunted, as any of the attendants will tell you. Wailing phantom dogs, disembodied voices, cold spots and white ladies have all been experienced in recent years.

As well as a Templar connection, Hackney can also boast – like

Rennes-le-Château – its resident 'Moleman': 75-year-old William Lyttle has been burrowing beneath his four-story Victorian house – much to the consternation of his neighbours – for some 40 years now, sometimes tunnelling straight down for 50ft (15m) before becoming 'bored' and starting on a fresh one. No one knows quite why he tunnels but, when directly questioned, Lyttle once responded that he was "building a swimming pool as part of a health club for ladies." In 2001, he caused a panic when part of the

street outside his house collapsed, revealing a 15-ft (4.6m) chasm, and earlier this year police forced entry to his crumbling property when neighbours become concerned about the sounds of fresh tunnelling...

For sheer high strangeness, though, the events of December 1981 are hard to beat. Four boys claimed to have seen "a giant great growling hairy thing" on the snow-covered expanse of Hackney Marshes. It had reared up on its hind legs like a bear – an identification that seemed to be confirmed by the bear-like tracks in the snow that the boys had seen earlier that day... and the fact that the gruesome discovery of two skinned and decapitated bears had been made in the nearby River Lea earlier that month. A 50-strong police team – equipped with guns, dogs and helicopters – searched the Marshes, but found only more strange tracks and no bear. There was talk of hoaxing, and of someone dressed in a bearskin (belonging to one of

the two skinned bears?) but no resolution to this baffling sequence of events.

2 ROMNEY MARSH, KENT

One of the most downright peculiar landscapes in Britain, the Marsh is a world of its own – as the Rev Harris Barham, Rector of Snargate, acknowledged in his *Ingoldsby Legends*: "The world according to the best geographers is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh". These flatlands were gradually reclaimed from the sea over the ages, but not without reversals: in the 13th century, the major port of Old Winchelsea was reclaimed by the waves and now lies two miles out in Rye Bay. Lost villages dot the Marsh too, marked only by the odd ruin or names such as Midley, Shorne and Galloways on old ordnance survey maps.

Immortalised in Russell Thorndyke's *Dr Syn* series, the brooding, eerily flat landscape of the Marsh will forever be associated with smugglers, and writers have always found it a potent source of inspiration. Henry James lived at nearby Lamb House, Rye, where he was troubled by a poltergeist that went on to plague later literary residents EF Benson – whose important body of ghost stories owes much to the area – and *Black Narcissus* author Rumer Godden. Other writers of a sometimes forteen bent dwelt on or around the Marsh in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Joseph Conrad, HG

HAUNTED PUBS

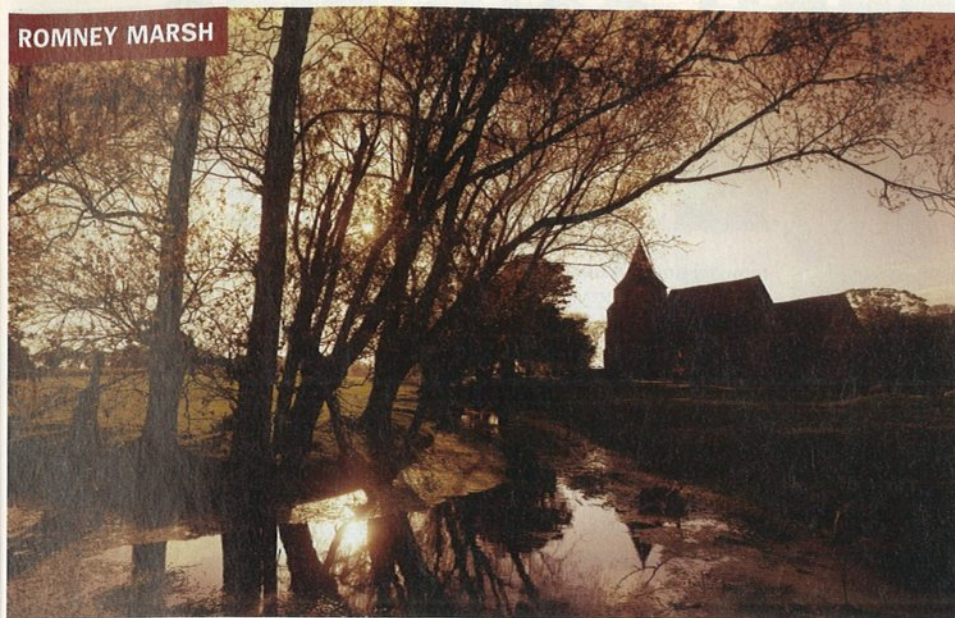
13 THE MERMAID INN

This remarkable old inn opened for business in 1420, and has the wide variety of spectral residents you might expect to find in such a venerable establishment, including a grey lady, a ghostly woman, a man in old-fashioned dress and a male figure who has a habit of walking through bathroom walls.

MERMAID STREET, RYE, EAST SUSSEX
TEL: 01797 223065



ROMNEY MARSH



Wells, Steven Crane, E Nesbit, and Noel Coward, and, more recently, the parapsychologically inclined goon Michael Bentine made his home here, evoking his beloved Marsh in the 1985 paranormal thriller *Lords of the Levels*.

And the Marsh is, like the rest of Kent, full of ghosts. A phantom cat inhabits the George Hotel in Lydd, jumping onto guests' beds as soon as they turn out the lights; an Elizabethan road ghost haunts the A259; disembodied footsteps and spectral monks have been recorded in St John's Chapel, New Romney; and the throbbing of ghostly engines over the marsh have been heard when no aircraft is visible in the skies; they belong, some say, to a German bomber shot down in 1940 during the Battle of Britain.

At the eastern end of the Marsh lies the old



and pretty town of Hythe, well worth a visit for the impressive ossuary in St Leonard's church. In the park here, in November 1963, a group of teenagers saw a bright 'star' descending from the sky to some nearby trees. Their curiosity was turned to terror when a black, headless, winged and web-footed figure emerged from the trees and approached them; understandably, the teens fled.

At its other, Western, end the Marsh is bounded by the great shingle headland of Dungeness; here, in a stony wilderness, you can see Derek Jarman's garden (he's buried in Old Romney) and enjoy a pint in the Pilot or Britannia while gazing out at an alien landscape resembling something out of Jon Pertwee-era *Dr Who* – which, in fact, it is: 'The Claws of Axos' was filmed precisely here, in the imposing shadow of Dungeness Power Station.

MORE REGIONAL WEIRDNESS

3 ALDERSHOT, HAMPSHIRE

Spring-heeled Jack – the fierce-looking caped menace who terrorised Victorian England for most of the 19th century – created several 'incidents' in the vicinity of Aldershot barracks in 1877.

4 ENFIELD, LONDON

One of Britain's most celebrated – and investigated – poltergeist outbreaks took place in an ordinary council house from 1977 to 1979 – inspiring the BBC's notorious *Ghostwatch* in the process. Bell Lane is also the preferred route of the 'Enfield Flyer', a ghostly carriage that races along with-

out its wheels touching the ground...

5 BIGGIN HILL AERODROME, BIGGIN HILL, KENT

This celebrated Battle of Britain fighter station boasts two ghosts, one the figure of a fully kitted-out wartime airman, the other the phantom, though unmistakable, sound of a Merlin-engined Spitfire passing at full throttle over the airfield.

6 HIGHGATE CEMETERY, LONDON

This sprawling, overgrown Victorian necropolis is one of London's most atmospheric locations and the late 1960s saw it give birth to the most famous of modern vampire legends – that of the 'Highgate Vampire'. The two main protagonists of this convoluted tale are still slugging it out to this day.

7 CLIFTONVILLE, KENT

Not much tends to disturb the faded Edwardian gentility of this seaside resort, but in the

summer of 1950 a sea monster with horse's ears was cited by two witnesses.

8 BLUEBELL HILL, ROCHESTER, KENT

Britain's most famous road ghost inhabits a stretch of highway here. Reports have included an urban legend-like phantom female hitchhiker and a terrifying old hag flagging down cars. There have also been sightings of an ostrich that turned into a big cat and a gorilla-like creature.

9 WEST WYCOMBE PARK, WEST WYCOMBE, BUCKS

Estate of Sir Francis Dashwood, leader of The Knights of Sir Francis (better known as the Hell Fire Club). On the hill opposite Dashwood's palladian mansion stands the great hexagonal flint structure of the Dashwood mausoleum, and below it the entrance to the West Wycombe caves creat-

SIDELINES

FERTILITY SEAT

Dozens of would-be mothers visited the Rising Sun pub in Ickford, Bucks, after one of its bar stools gained the reputation of helping women conceive. Landlady Terri Hargreaves and 13 other villagers all gave birth after sitting on the stool, and it was subsequently credited with a further 45 pregnancies after women flocked to the pub from as far away as America.

SHC SURVIVOR

Computer operator Paul Hayes burst into flames from the waist up while walking along a road in Stepney Green in May 1985. "I thought I could hear my brains bubbling," he told investigators. After 30 seconds, the fire suddenly died down and he survived – a possible victim of spontaneous human combustion.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM SOUTHERN ENGLAND

PENSIONERS FRUSTRATED IN BATTLE AGAINST HUGE TREE

Bournemouth Daily Echo, 23 June 2003

FERRET MUM NOT GUILTY OF NEGLECT

Canterbury AdScene, 4 July 2003



ed by Dashwood in the mid-17th century and probably used by the 'Monks' for some serious partying.

10 HERTFORD, HERTFORDSHIRE

In 1929, two young children saw a tiny pilot, in an appropriately tiny biplane, fly over their garden fence (nearly hitting a dustbin), and fly off again with a friendly wave.

11 READING, BERKSHIRE

In November 1978, the charred body of Mrs Lucy Gmiterek was found in her basement flat; there was little sign of fire in the vicinity and this has been put forward as a classic case of spontaneous human combustion.

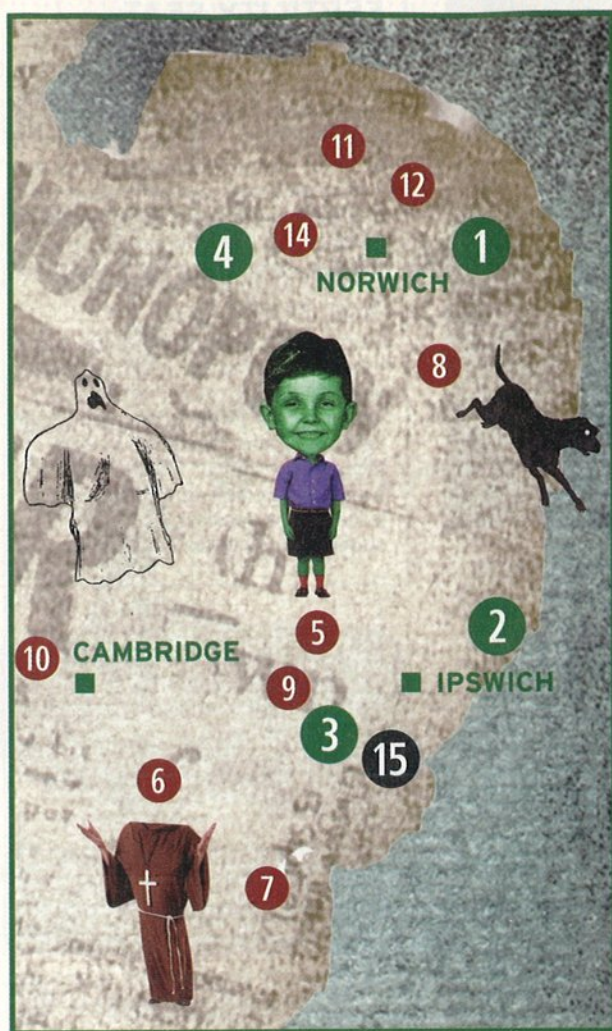
12 CATERHAM, SURREY

On 28 July 1963, motorists were understandably alarmed by the spectacle of eight men in black cowls 'running and leaping across the road to the dual carriageway' with 'silent and odd' movements.

HILL



THE EASTERN COUNTIES



1 CALLOW PIT, NORFOLK

Callow pit between Southwood and Moulton in Norfolk is the site of one East Anglian mystery. In mediæval days, a roof-thatcher and a carpenter had both fallen on hard times. They'd heard that a treasure chest lay below the deep waters of Callow pit, but the legend also told of a demon, monster, or spirit-of-the-pit that guarded this legendary treasure.

The two adventurers risked their lives by



LIONEL AND PATRICIA FANTHORPE ARE YOUR GUIDES

Over the centuries, East Anglia has been invaded and settled by Celts, Romans, Saxons and Vikings. Every cultural wave has brought its sagas, myths and legends: Where is Queen Boadicea's (or Boudicca's) grave and the hidden treasure of her Iceni tribe? How many Mithraic temples are concealed below Caister in Norfolk and Colchester in Essex? There's an East Anglian proverb: "We are different and we do different". As East Anglians born and bred, we'll drink to that!

placing the thatcher's ladders across the pit and using his hook to trawl the depths. They finally located the treasure chest, and began hauling it up. With the handle of the chest securely in their hands, they began lifting it clear of the water. The excited carpenter shouted: "We've got it! Not even the spirit of the pit could take it from us." Legend tells how a huge black claw then emerged from the depths of Callow pit and seized the treasure chest. The fearless Norfolkmen hung on grimly; they never gave way – but the handle did! The vast claw dragged the treasure chest (minus its handle) down into the pit: ruefully, the carpenter and the thatcher gave the handle to the

and pointed," wrote Ralph of Coggeshall, "and he was exceedingly shaggy". He was imprisoned in the castle and ate whatever was provided, but evidently preferred raw fish. Refusing to speak, he was "hung up by his feet and cruelly tortured".

When allowed to swim, he broke through three strong nets and made for the deep sea, but having cavorted to his satisfaction, inexplicably returned and stayed with the folk of Orford for about two months before returning to the sea, this time for ever. Chronicler Ralph pondered whether he was human, a manlike fish, or "an evil spirit lurking in the body of a drowned man".

3 THE RED BARN MURDER, SUFFOLK

Maria Marten was born in 1801, daughter of the Polstead mole-catcher, Thomas

Marten. Maria's mother, Grace, died when Maria was nine, and Thomas married again, taking a much younger woman as his new wife. This second Mrs Marten had a strange, recurring dream after Maria's sudden and suspicious disappearance.

The 19th-century melodramas that followed the tragedy featured Maria as the innocent young victim of an experienced seducer, a farmer named William Corder. Unravelling Maria's mysterious death reveals that she was older than Corder, and already had illegitimate children fathered by various men in the Polstead area.

The heart of the mystery is her step-mother's recurring dream that Maria's body lay below the Red Barn on Corder's farm. Mrs Marten finally persuaded Thomas and the farm bailiff to dig where the dream indicated: there lay all that

Southwood vicar, who fastened it to the church door.

An associated Callow pit legend tells of a headless horseman who gallops from the pit towards Cantley at midnight. What's behind these mysteries? Turbulent politics and tides of marauders over past centuries led wealthy East Anglians to hide their treasure hoping to retrieve it when peace returned. They rarely had the chance: the legend of the headless horseman may reflect the fate of one such treasure hider. Vigilant mediæval peasants could well have seen something that looked valuable

being lowered secretly into the stygian

depths of Callow pit – hence the hidden treasure legend – but could it still be there, waiting to be recovered?

2 THE MERMAN OF ORFORD, SUFFOLK

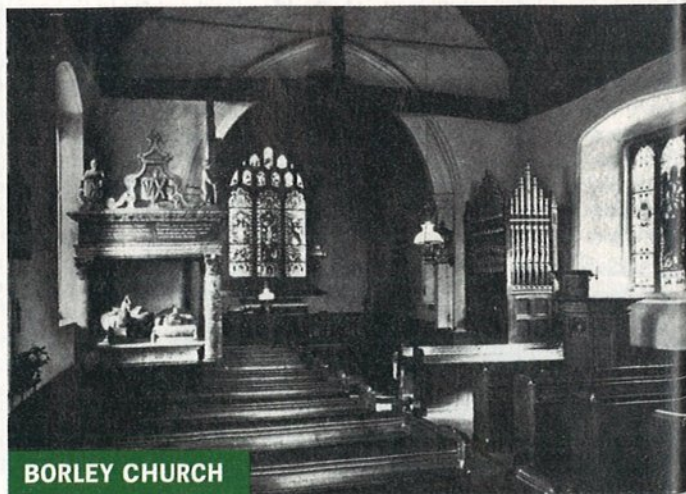
In the late 12th century, the fishermen of Orford netted a merman. "His beard was profuse

HAUNTED PUBS

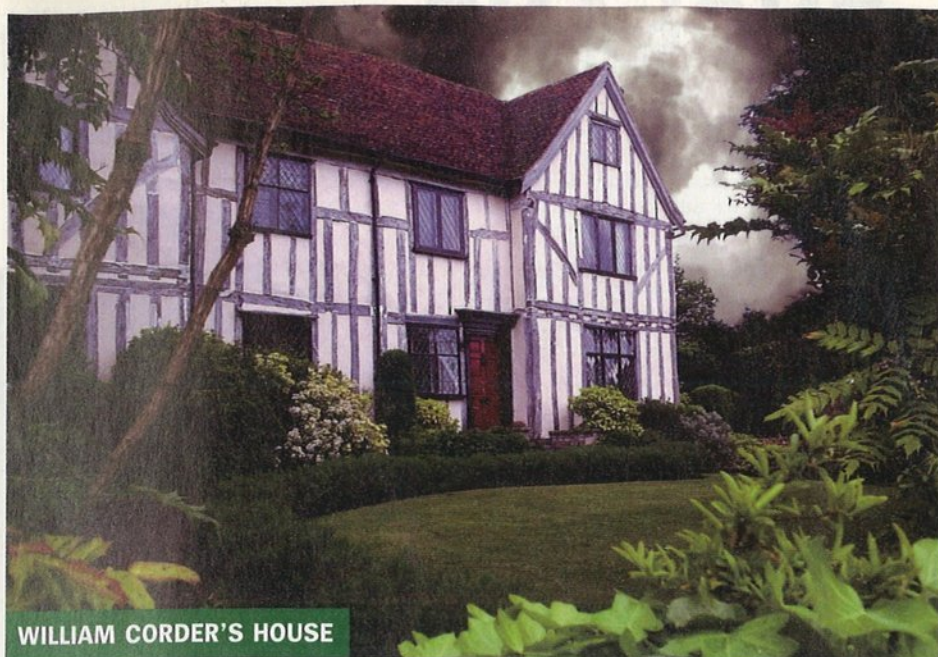
15 THE THORN HOTEL

The Thorn was one of the inns Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins used to meet informers and interrogate victims, and it has all the ghostly unpleasantness you'd expect: the cellars cause feelings of dejection and hopelessness, guests are woken by a strange spectral presence, and Hopkins himself is occasionally spotted in the attic.

HIGH STREET, MISTLEY, ESSEX
TEL: 206 392821



BORLEY CHURCH



WILLIAM CORDER'S HOUSE

SIMON PRICE

remained of Maria – identifiable mainly by her earrings. Corder was apprehended in London, brought back to East Anglia, duly tried and hanged at Bury St Edmunds on 11 August 1828.

4 THE PEDLAR OF SWAFFHAM, NORFOLK

Another mysterious dream – this time a benign one – relates to the village of Swaffham in Norfolk. John Chapman, a Swaffham peddler, had a compelling dream that if he travelled to London Bridge, he would hear news that would make him rich.

He followed the advice in the dream and struck up a conversation with a London Bridge resident, who laughed at John's credulity and added that if John was the kind of fool who believed in dreams he should go to Swaffham, where he had dreamt that there was a pot of gold buried beneath an apple tree in a peddler's garden.

John raced home, dug below his tree and duly found the gold. He became a benefactor of Swaffham church, where he was later Church Warden, and helped the local poor.



LIONEL AND PATRICIA FANTHORPE

MORE REGIONAL WEIRDNESS

5 WOOLPIT, SUFFOLK

The 'Green Children' appeared in a Suffolk field in the 12th century, where their bright green skin amazed the harvesters.

6 TILTY ABBEY, THAXTED, ESSEX

Phantom of a headless monk frequently reported.

7 WITHAM, ESSEX

Centre of a Templar-Masonic mystery; three pubs – all called *The Compasses* – are said to follow a ley.



8 BUNGAY, SUFFOLK

Black Shuck burst into Bungay church during the great storm of 4 August 1577 and killed three worshippers. That same day, he also appeared in Blythburgh church, 12 miles away, causing another three deaths.

9 BORLEY, SUFFOLK

The notoriously haunted Rectory burned down in 1939, but reports of strange phenomena – including phantom organ music and weird cries – continue to come from Borley church located nearby.

10 CAXTON GIBBET, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Ghosts of hanged criminals.

11 BLICKLING HALL, NORFOLK

Reports of Anne Boleyn's ghost being seen every 19 May, the day on which she was beheaded in 1536.

12 WROXHAM BROAD, NORFOLK

Location of a 'time-slip' – people have found themselves seemingly transported back to Roman times.

13 THE MILL HOTEL, SUDBURY, SUFFOLK

Strange events reportedly

took place when the mummified remains of a cat were moved from its resting place.

14 ST WITHBURGA'S WELL, DEREHAM CHURCHYARD, NORFOLK Mysterious healing powers attributed to the waters.



SIDELINES

BONAPARTE BARNEY

A man lost four teeth at a New Year's fancy dress party at Caistor Hall Hotel, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk, in 1999 when a man dressed as Napoleon lunged at him for no reason. Two years previously, at the same hotel, another assault by a man dressed as Napoleon had led to an arrest. Police did not link the two events.

METEORITE ROCKS GARDENER

Arthur Pettifor, 82 at the time, was planting onions in his Glatton, Cambridgeshire, garden in 1991 when he heard a loud 'swooshing' noise from above. Something clipped the top of a tree and crashed through a conifer hedge just 20ft (6m) from where he stood. Mr Pettifor and his neighbour located the object, which had landed in a shallow crater and was warm to the touch. Since the police weren't interested in it, the stony lump was sent to the Natural History Museum's minerals section, where it was identified as meteoric in origin.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM THE EASTERN COUNTIES

IMPS COME FROM BEHIND TO SINK SWANS

Lincoln Chronicle, 15 April 2004

COLLEGE LODGES APPEAL FOR SPEED

Cambridge Evening News, 27 July 1993

THE MOST HAUNTED HOUSE IN ENGLAND



CENTRAL ENGLAND



DR KARL SHUKER IS YOUR GUIDE TO THE REGION

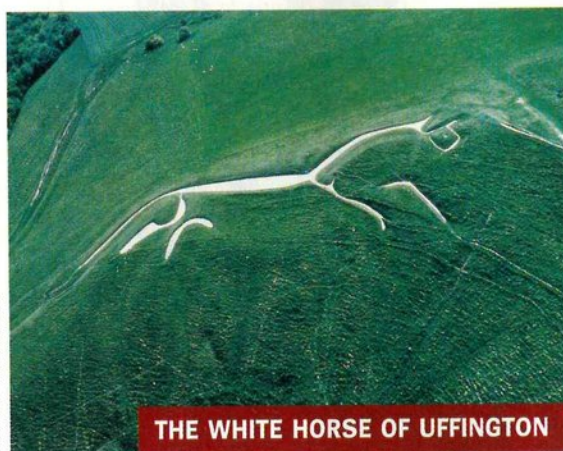
At first sight, the Midlands – especially its industrial heartland – might seem too prosaic a region of Britain to provide much in the way of fortan phenomena. Yet, in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. From Derbyshire in the north of the region, through the central Midlands themselves, and continuing south to Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, an impressive array of ghosts and spectres, UFOs, and ancient stones jostle for attention alongside alien big cats, religious enigmas, the Little People, and even the (very) odd water monster or dragon.



1 THE WHITE HORSE OF UFFINGTON (OFF MAP)

Carved into the Oxfordshire hillside near Uffington is this dramatic, ancient – but still controversial – chalk image, 300ft (90m) long, and believed to date back to pre-Roman Celtic times, c.1400BC. Due to its superficial resemblance to similarly stylised beak-headed depictions of (supposed) horses on early Celtic coins, it is popularly deemed to be a horse, but some researchers consider it more feline than equine in form. Moreover, there is another very different school of thought, proposing that this White Horse is actually a representation of a white dragon, one that was slain on a small flat-topped hill in this same vicinity by none other than the most famous dragon-dispatcher of all – St George.

FORTAN PICTURE LIBRARY



THE WHITE HORSE OF UFFINGTON

Legend has it that the dragon's blood poisoned the soil on the hill's summit, so that nothing will grow there. Researches conducted on the White Horse in the mid-1990s revealed that it had been created by digging deep trenches, which form the horse's outline, then filling these trenches with chalk quarried from the hill above; but, its actual purpose remains unclear. An image commemorating the slaying of a monster, or perhaps a Celtic tribal emblem? The millennia continue to roll by but we still have no answer.

total, drove out of the bushes around the park's lake in 30 tiny red and white bubble cars. According to their amazed eyewitnesses, these extraordinary entities had greenish wrinkled faces, white beards tipped in red, wore bright coloured tunics and leggings, with pointed caps on their heads, and were only half as tall as the children. The gnomes drove around for about 15 minutes – even playfully chasing the children – but were not frightening or aggressive. Not surprisingly, when the attended school the following day and spoke of what they had seen, the

children were interviewed separately and rigorously by their headmaster, but their testimonies were predominantly consistent and they insisted that their story was true. Furthermore, once it became public, other local people came forward to claim that they too had spied these mini-motorists in the park, especially near the lake, and Marjor Johnson, a former secretary of the Nottingham-based Fairy Investigation Society, confirmed that she had received a number of previous reports of Little People frequenting this locality.

HAUNTED PUBS

14 YE OLDE TRIP TO JERUSALEM

The Trip claims to be England's oldest pub: knights drank here before leaving for the Crusades. In 1330, Edward III used it as an entrance to the caves which riddle the rock behind and lead up to Nottingham Castle where he arrested his mother's lover, and her ghost now paces the pub's cellars pleading for mercy.

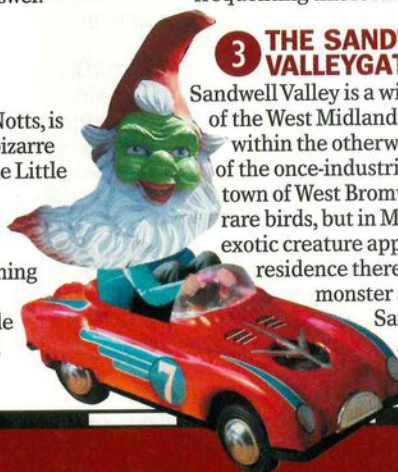
BREWHOUSE YARD, CASTLE ROAD, NOTTINGHAM, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
TEL: 0115 947 3171

2 THE BUBBLE-CAR GNOMES OF WOLLATON PARK

Wollaton Park in Nottingham, Notts, is the setting for one of the most bizarre modern-day encounters with the Little People ever recorded. A small group of 8–10-year-old children were walking home from the park at around 8.30pm one evening in late September 1979 when, they claim, a veritable cavalcade of gnomes, approximately 60 in

3 THE SANDWELL VALLEYGATOR

Sandwell Valley is a wildlife oasis in the heart of the West Midlands, an RSPB Reserve within the otherwise-urbanised confines of the once-industrialised Black Country town of West Bromwich. It often attracts rare birds, but in March 1999 a much more exotic creature appeared to have taken residence there – an elusive water monster aptly dubbed the Sandwell Valleygator. According to



SIDELINES

FLYING CAT

A rare natural wonder was shown at Oxford Zoo in 1933 - a winged cat, found by Mrs Hughes Griffiths at Summertown. She had seen a strange black-and-white cat in her gardens. Some days later, she claims she saw it fly from the floor of her stable to a beam. The zoo's curator captured the cat, and placed it on display. A press report said: "There is no doubt about its wings. They grow just in front of its hindquarters."

GHOSTLY GOAT

In 1989, the Boulter family of Leicester began to notice a strange slime in their semi-detached council house. At first it collected in pools or dripped down the stairs, but within two years had become a major problem, appearing on furniture, attaching itself to visitors' clothes and attacking the family's goldfish in their tank. A local C of E canon visited, and experienced visions of a dark-haired woman and "a young goat, a kid". Oddly enough, this chimed with tests done on the substance at Leicester University, which found it to be animal urine, but not that of a cat or dog.

EXTRA EXTRA HEADLINES FROM CENTRAL ENGLAND

SCHOOL REFORM BILL SPELLS CHAOS

Workshop Guardian, 22 Dec 1992

VETS BAFFLED BY BALD HEDGEHOGS

Wolverhampton Express and Star, 25 Aug 1993

SHROPSHIRE UNION CANAL, NR WOODSEAVES, STAFFORDSHIRE

A ferocious, paranormal entity nicknamed the man-monkey terrorises the bridge over this stretch of the canal, and the mysterious entity has been reported by many people here.

BOMERE POOL, LEICESTERSHIRE

Reputed to contain a monstrous fish with a sword strapped to its flank, and also had turned from Christianity to paganism.

DR KARL SHUKER INVESTIGATING THE SANDWELL VALLEYGATOR



DR KARL SHUKER

EDALE, DERBYSHIRE

In and around the country lanes of Edale in the Peak District, a number of encounters

Zoo's superintendent in 1980. years, including one by Dudley puma sightings through the urban site of several convincing MIDLANDS The unexpectedly

haired mermaid who once threatened to drown the town of Leek.

WHITE CLIFF CHAPEL, HAWKSTONE PARK, SHROPSHIRE

A mysterious green onyx goblet uncovered here was claimed by some researchers in the mid-1990s to be the Holy Grail.

Haunted by several notable ghosts, including the shade of Lady Jane Grey, plus the headless ghost of her father.

at night, are said to be impossible to count accurately, and have geomagnetic energy links.

ASTLEY CASTLE, WARWICKSHIRE

Renowned as the most haunted village in the Cotswolds, Prestbury is frequented by various phantoms, such as a ghostly knight on horseback, black abbot, spinet player, cavalier, and even a spectral sheep-herd complete with a herd of spectral sheep.

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CANNOCK CHASE, STAFFORDSHIRE

This extensive tract of woodland has become a major hotspot in recent years for sightings of triangular UFOs.

ROLLRIGHT STONES, OXFORDSHIRE

These ancient standing stones reputedly move their positions

THE ROLLRIGHT STONES

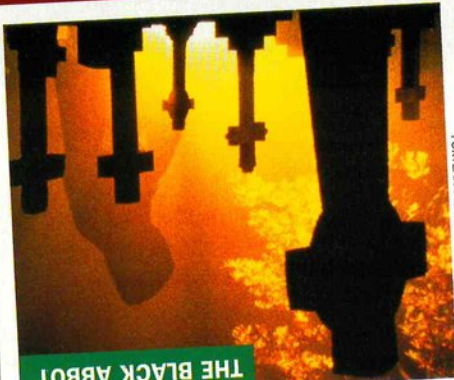


FORTRAN PICTURE LIBRARY



eyewitnesses, it was over 2ft (60cm) long with four legs, a sizeable tail and snout, and a penchant for snapping at Canada geese or anything else that came too near to it. In Swan Pool, a large body of fresh water (over a mile [1.6km] in circumference) in the reserve. Opinions as to the Valleygator's identity ranged from an escaped/released pet crocodile to an absconded specimen is a much more tenable candidate for the Valleygator, which two years earlier had made West Brom's Swan Pool one of Britain's most unexpected cryptozoological localities.

debuted, but Sandwell Council dismissed the possibility that it was the 'Gator. However, as a more tantalising tail-piece to this still-unresolved case, a second, far bigger (and hence much more formidable) American snapper, measuring 2.5ft (76cm) long and weighing a hefty 20lb (7.5kg), was netted in Swan Pool by three teenagers in July 2001. Clearly another



THE BLACK ABBOT

FORTRAN PICTURE LIBRARY

BLACKMERE, STAFFORDSHIRE

This dark and sinister pool allegedly harbours an alluring but murderous raven-

here was claimed by some researchers in the mid-1990s to be the Holy Grail.

WHITE CLIFF CHAPEL, HAWKSTONE PARK, SHROPSHIRE

A mysterious green onyx goblet uncovered here was claimed by some researchers in the mid-1990s to be the Holy Grail.

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1 CASTELL DINAS BRAN, LLANGOLLEN, DENBIGHSHIRE

This ruined castle is a prominent local landmark atop a hill which overlooks the small town of Llangollen in the Dee valley, as well as a contender for the location of the Grail Castle. The castle's name links the site to Arthurian legend: Bran was a Celtic god-king whose severed head King Arthur dug up from its burial place on Tower Hill in London. It was said that so long as the head was buried, no enemies could invade and conquer Britain. There was also said to be a hoard of treasure deep beneath the castle, which could only be found by a boy followed by a white dog with silver eyes – such dogs were said to be able to see the wind.

The hill is also said to be a fairy haunt, and a shepherd boy watching over the sheep on the hillside one evening is said to have had a dramatic encounter with them. He met a little man playing the fiddle, and as it grew dusk, more fairies appeared and began to dance. At first the shepherd boy would not join them, as he knew the dangers, but the temptation proved too great



HAUNTED PUBS

15 SKIRRID MOUNTAIN INN

Given that it doubled up as a court-house until the mid-19th century – and apparently saw over 180 executions – it's perhaps no surprise that the ancient Skirrid Inn is thought to be the most haunted pub in Wales. But don't let tales of long-dead felons slipping phantom nooses about the necks of guests put you off staying there...

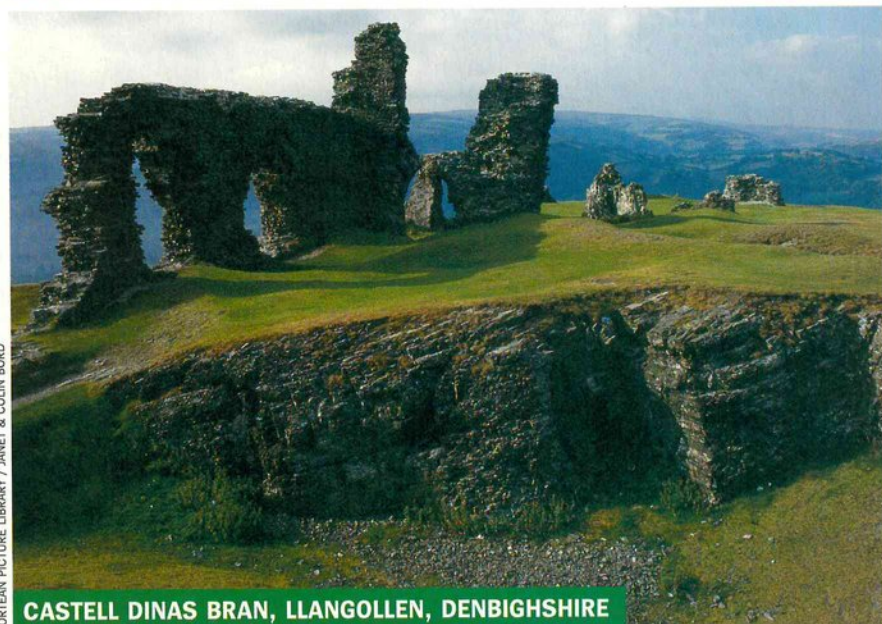
LLANFIHANGEL CRUCORNEY, GWENT
TEL: 01783 890258

WALES



JANET BORD IS YOUR GUIDE

Well known for its beautiful mountain landscapes, its long spectacular coastline, and its historic castles, Wales may be a small country, but it is overflowing with history and mystery. Not only is it a strong contender for the true location of the Arthurian legends, it also has a rich fairy-lore, and in addition is one of the most haunted countries in the world. There have also in recent years been UFO flaps, big cat sightings, phantom black dogs, and even lake monster reports. You don't have to travel far in Wales to visit amazing places!



CASTELL DINAS BRAN, LLANGOLLEN, DENBIGHSHIRE

and he began to dance. Immediately, the fairies turned into monsters, and he realised he had been tricked by the Devil. He was forced to dance all night, and was found by his master at daybreak, still dancing all alone on the hill. The precise location of the Nant-yr-Ellyllon (Hollow of the Goblins) is unclear – but the whole hill has a magical atmosphere.

2 BALA LAKE (LLYN TEGID), GWYNEDD

This famous lake is the largest area of natural fresh water in Wales, about 4 miles (6.4km) long by 1 mile (1.6km) wide. Less well known are the legends explaining how the lake came into existence. One story tells of the cover being left off Cower's Well, which overflowed and so the lake was formed, with the old town of Bala being drowned in the process. In another version, the town was drowned because of the sinfulness of a cruel

prince who lived in a palace. He ignored a voice he sometimes heard which said 'Vengeance will come' – but a harpist who was playing at a party to celebrate the birth of the prince's grandson also heard a voice saying 'Vengeance, vengeance', and followed a hovering bird out of the palace and up a hill. He wandered lost on the hill until daybreak, when he saw that the palace had gone and a lake had mysteriously appeared overnight.

The lake is rich in wildlife, and is home to a unique fish, the gwyniad, which is a member of the salmon family and lives nowhere else. Even stranger are the occasional monster sightings, like that made by the woman driving past in

October 1979 who saw a humpbacked creature emerge briefly. She discovered that the lake warden had also seen such a creature, and a local greengrocer had seen something with 'a large head like a football and rather big eyes', when he was in a boat on the lake. It had appeared to be nearly 8ft (2.4m) long, and swam to within a few yards of the boat, but did not seem aggressive.

In 1974, a man driving past the lake saw a light like a 'blinding sun' that flashed over his car, leaving a grey powder on his vehicle. He also claimed to have seen antenna-like protrusions on the object.

3 GWYDIR CASTLE, LLANRWST, CONWY

Mostly dating from the 16th century, this atmospheric mansion has been undergoing a painstaking restoration in recent years, the whole story of which has been well told in *Castles in the Air* by Judy Corbett. She does not forget to mention the numerous ghosts that have been experienced in the house down the years, some of them positively malevolent, like the one that tried to push people downstairs, or the presence 'lurking in the shadows' as Judy worked in her bookbinding studio. Judy knew that the ghost's name was Margaret, and felt that she was angry with Peter, Judy's husband. Her malignant presence was dissipated once they discovered the sad facts of Lady Margaret Cave's life – and also that the bindery had been called the Ghost Room.

When a hoard of old bones was found under a wall in the cellar, the police had to be called in – but further investigation revealed that they were the bones of 'a large and ancient dog'.



Coincidentally, there had been numerous sightings of a ghost dog, which stood and stared but disappeared as soon as the observer looked away; it was seen playing with the live dogs in the garden; but most sightings were close to where the bones were found. Judy and Peter decided the dog may have been a foundation sacrifice, and reburied some of its bones in the wall.

For a house so steeped in history and rich in ghost-lore, Gwydir Castle has a surprisingly calm and friendly atmosphere, but it is not difficult to believe that it has been, and may still be, one of the most haunted houses in Wales.

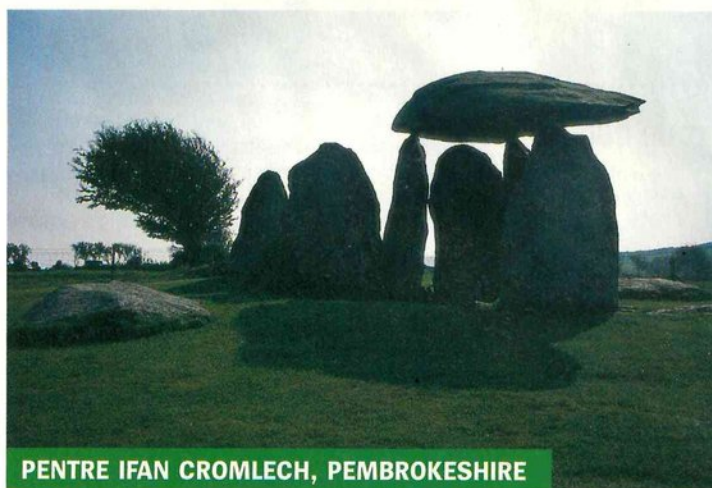
4 PRESELI MOUNTAINS, PEMBROKESHIRE

This wild rocky landscape is most famous as the source of the Bluestones at Stonehenge, and the arguments still rage as to how the stones made their way to Wiltshire. The precise outcrop from which the Bluestones came has been identified, and all around are other prehistoric sites. The well-known cromlech Pentre Ifan, consisting of giant upright stones with another balanced on top, is also in the Preselis; fairies have reportedly been seen there, and somewhere close by is said to be a flight of steps leading down into Fairyland. A shepherd boy who ventured down them met and married a fairy and their son was Taliesin, the famous poet.

Possibly the most dramatic fairy location is Freni Fawr, a hill on which there are several prehistoric tumuli, and, on top of one tumulus, a modern spiral of stones has been laid. This windswept landscape was very familiar to the shepherd boy who one day met the Little People out on Freni Fawr. They took him to Fairyland, where he found himself in a fairy palace eating fine food and drinking wine from a golden goblet. He was told that he must never drink from the well in the garden that contained golden fishes, but his curiosity got the better of

him, and as soon as he disobeyed, he found himself suddenly back on the barren hillside with his sheep. He thought he had been in Fairyland for many years, but in truth he had only been away for a few moments.

Not far away, the peak of Carn Ingli was said to be the place where the Celtic saint Brynach communed with the angels in the 6th century. Some people can see gigantic rock figures on the mountain, especially a sleeping giant and a sleeping goddess; while a well among the rocks of Carn Cawn may mark another entrance to the Otherworld or Fairyland.



PENTRE IFAN CROMLECH, PEMBROKESHIRE

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CAPEL-Y-FFIN, POWYS

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in hu cut up

SIDELINES

PIGS MIGHT FLY

A dark black object with four legs and short wings, which looked like nothing so much as a flying pig, soared over Froncysyllte in Clwyd on 2 September 1905 during the great Welsh religious revival. It was estimated to be two miles up and travelling at 20 mph.

MYSTERY BEANS

Five thousand empty baked bean tins, without labels, were found along a five-mile stretch of the A48 in Gwent on three occasions early in 1985. The mystery of their origin remains unsolved despite an investigation.

PHANTOM BOMBER

Phantom planes are sometimes spotted over Wales. A ghostly Wellington bomber has been observed flying down the Towy Valley between Lendeilo and Llandovery, Dyfed, following the flightpath of an old WWII training course. Locals say the aircraft is always completely silent.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM WALES

ATTACK BY GOAT ENDS IN CAR BAN

North Wales Weekly News, 27 Jan 1994

BOOTS FINED FOR SELLING UNDERAGE GIRL DRACULA

Western Morning News, 25 Oct 1995

AND THERE'S MORE!!!

5 BODFARI, DENBIGHSHIRE

Young boy (who later became a reverend doctor) saw dancing fairies in 1757.

6 PLAS TEG, PONTBLYDDYN, FLINTSHIRE

Many ghosts reported at this spooky mansion, and on the road running past.

(pictured below)

7 CAPEL-Y-FFIN, POWYS

Visions of the Virgin Mary seen in late 19th century.

8 YSGYRD FAWR (SKIRRID), ABERGAVENNY, MONMOUTHSHIRE

Holy mountain with a ravine said to be the result of an earthquake during the Crucifixion.

9 ST BRIDE'S BAY, PEMBROKESHIRE

Many UFO encounters at sites along the coast during the mid-1970s; UFOs and aliens seen on Stack Rock offshore.

10 EGRYN CHAPEL, LLANFAIR, NEAR HARLECH, GWYNEDD

Lights seen in the sky accompanying evangelist preacher Mary Jones, 1905.

11 LLYN BARFOG NR ABERDOVEY, GWYNEDD

Magical mountain lake where fairy cattle disappeared into the water; nearby is Carn March Arthur, a rock with King Arthur's horse's hoofprint.

12 OAKENHOLT, FLINTSHIRE

Gaynor Sunderland saw a landed UFO and

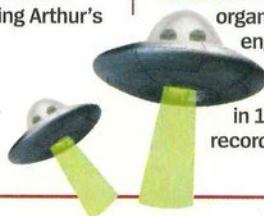
alien in 1976 and had many strange UFO-linked experiences.

13 FELINGWM UCHAF, CARMARTHENSHIRE

One of several locations in West Wales where mystery big cats were reported in the 1990s.

14 THE PRINCE OF WALES INN, KENFIG, BRIDGEND, SOUTH WALES

After ghostly voices and organ music were heard, engineers attached electrodes to a stone wall in the pub in 1982 and were able to record voices.



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THE NORTH OF ENGLAND



GAIL-NINA ANDERSON IS YOUR GUIDE

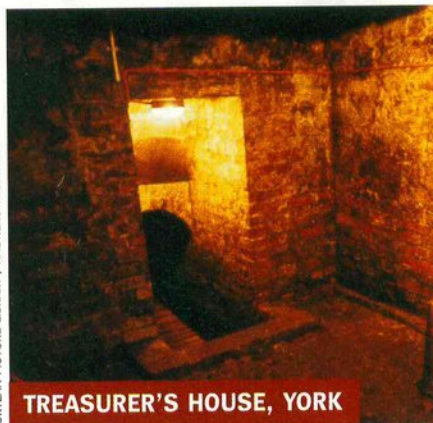
The landscape and culture of Northern England bear the evidence of every hand that has moulded the region. Prehistoric farmers, Roman legions, early Christians and Norsemen provide the early chapters in a story that includes mills and mining and optimistic modern revitalisation projects involving repackaging the past for tourist consumption. Old legends don't die – a swift mention of sword dancing, Horngarth, Shrovetide football, rush-bearing and New Year tar-barrels shows that we hang on to anything weird and wonderful.



1 YORK, YORKSHIRE

York is reputedly the most haunted city in Britain (if not the world), and the list of its ghostly traditions, not to mention modern occurrences, goes beyond the scope of this article. Founded as a Roman fortress and successively occupied by Saxons, Vikings, and Normans, the city thereafter remained a highly significant mercantile and religious centre for Northern England before reinventing its own past as a tourist attraction. With this palimpsest of history, it's no surprise that spectres from every period can be found there – especially if you take one of the many Ghost Tours. Most spectacular must

FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / ANDREAS TROTTMAN



TREASURER'S HOUSE, YORK

be the reappearance of a lost Roman legion, spotted in 1953 by an apprentice plumber installing a heating system in the cellars of the Treasurer's house. The soldiers, heralded by the sound of a horn, looked weary and dejected. They were only visible from the knees up, but as a Roman road lies some 15 in (38cm) below the cellar floor, they were presumably walking at that level. Several subsequent sightings have been reported, which may be why this part of the Treasurer's house is now closed to visitors.

2 WHITBY, YORKSHIRE

Some places are weird by nature while others have weirdness unexpectedly thrust upon them. Whitby, a fishing port

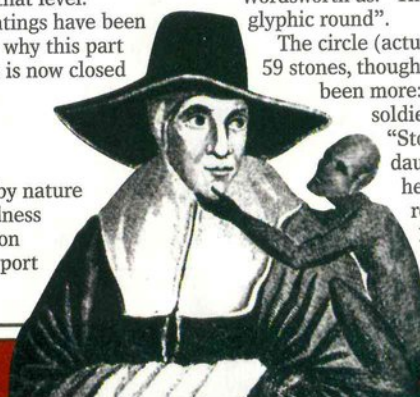
on the North Yorkshire coast, falls into both categories. Its distinctive natural harbour and associations with Captain Cook and the whaling trade make it an inevitable venue for assorted sea-faring spectres. Above the town rise the ruins of Whitby Abbey, founded in AD 657 by the remarkable St Hilda, who was also responsible for driving all the snakes in Whitby over the cliffs, where they turned into stone on the beach below. (Ammonites are a comparatively common find here, and it was not unknown for local stone carvers to give them little heads to ensure their identity with Hilda's petrified snakes.) One of Hilda's followers was the Cowherd Caedmon who in a heavenly vision was granted the gift of song that caused him to become the first English Christian poet.

Nineteenth century Whitby gained gloomier associations when its natural reserves of jet (hard black fossilised wood) made it the centre of production for Victorian mourning jewellery. An even more morbid connection resulted from Irish-born author Bram Stoker's decision to holiday there in 1890. He was already gestating ideas for a Gothic novel when books borrowed from Whitby Library helped engender the birth of *Dracula* (publ. 1897). Although there is arguably no native British vampire tradition, the association between Whitby and *Dracula* has forged an immensely strong fictional link. Part of the novel is recognisably set in the town: Dracula first enters Britain in the form of a "great dog", leaping ashore from a shipwreck, and later drinks the blood of the hapless Lucy in the cliff-top churchyard of St Mary's, within sight of the Abbey. So potent is Stoker's novel that Whitby can now boast a distinctly Gothic side, with its own vampire society, two major Goth gatherings every year and an ever-increasing quantity of Dracula-related merchandise in its gift shops. The town's small museum is a cabinet of appropriate curiosities, ranging from fossils and jet carvings to maritime memorabilia and a spectacular Hand of Glory.

3 LONG MEG AND HER DAUGHTERS, HUNSONBY, CUMBRIA

Throw a stick in Cumbria and if you miss a ghost-ridden ruin then you'll hit a stone circle: Hunsonby, near Penrith, offers the Neolithic stone circle known as Long Meg and her daughters (or sisters), eulogised by Wordsworth as: "That Sisterhood in hieroglyphic round".

The circle (actually an oval) consists of 59 stones, though there may once have been more: in 1634 three Norwich soldiers reported seeing "Stony Meg and her 77 daughters as hard-hearted as herself". Long Meg is a narrow sandstone outstander, 12 feet (3.6m) high, carved with a cup-and-



HAUNTED PUBS

14 YE OLDE STARRE INNE

This pub's cellar was used as an operating room for soldiers during the Civil War, and sometimes during the early mornings you can still hear them scream. It also boasts a mysterious old woman in black, and two phantasmic cats who were bricked up alive in the wall to protect against bad luck.

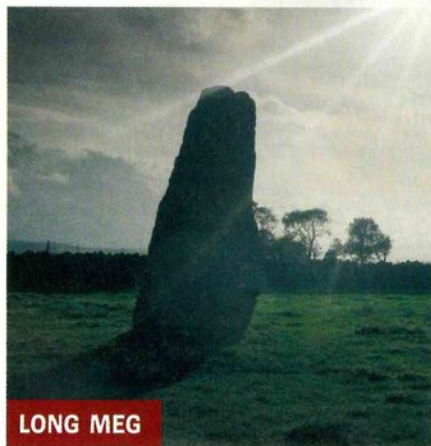
40 STONEGATE, YORK, NORTH YORKSHIRE TEL: 01904 623063



WHITBY

circle marking. According to legend, Meg and her daughters, all witches, were caught dancing on the Sabbath and were turned to stone by a horrified priest (or possibly a wizard, sometimes named as Michael Scott). The spell will be broken if someone counts the stones and gets the same number twice, which they apparently never do (this may explain the soldiers' total of 77). It is said that if Meg is gashed or broken, she will bleed. She is also very territorial – an 18th-century attempt to dismantle the circle was halted forever by a torrential thunderstorm.

There are around 50 ancient stone circles in Cumbria, including an unusual formation of two roughly concentric rings at Birkrigg (The Druids' Circle) and a poignantly positioned one at Seascale (the Grey Croft Circle) sited dramatically close to Sellafield Nuclear Power station.



LONG MEG



SIDELINES

HAYSTACK ALIENS

David Wilson was walking through a field near Gateshead on 6 June 1964 when he spotted 10 'children' standing near a haystack, and six or eight more crouching on top of it. Each figure was dressed in green; they were digging at the stack as if searching for something. Several days earlier, several people in Tyne & Wear had reported seeing discs and flashing lights in the sky.

ICE FROM HEAVEN

A two kg (4.4lb) block of ice plummeted from the skies over Manchester on 2 April 1973 and shattered at the feet of Dr RF Griffiths – who as Met Office observer was the one man in the city qualified to appreciate the uniqueness of the event.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

BROWNIES HIT BY SATAN WORSHIP

Yorkshire On Sunday, 3 Oct 1993

BLIND STICK ACCUSED IN COURT

Liverpool Echo, 4 Sept 1993

MORE REGIONAL WEIRDNESS

4 CHILLINGHAM CASTLE, NORTHUMBERLAND In the park around Chillingham Castle lives a herd of white cattle with red ears, the direct descendants of the great wild herds of pre-Roman Britain. Their colouring is echoed in several accounts of wild "fairy cattle".

5 COTTINGLEY, WEST YORKSHIRE In 1917 and 1920, cousins Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright obliged the adults of their family by taking photographs of the fairies they played with. Though actually made with paper cutouts, the Cottingley Fairies would be classed as an unsolved mystery for decades.

6 HEXHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND In 1972 the "Hexham Heads" – roughly carved heads of a Celtic type – were dug up and

subsequently linked to terrifying visions of a "werewolf".

7 HILTON CASTLE, WEAR VALLEY, CO. DURHAM Once haunted by the Cauld Lad, a shivering stable boy whose corpse was thrown into a well by his murdering master, Robert Hilton. Anyone who saw him was afflicted with a deathly coldness but the servants got rid of the ghost by leaving him a green cloak and hood, on receipt of which he departed.

8 KIRKLEES PARK, YORKSHIRE According to ballad sources, Robin Hood was bled to death by his aunt,

the Abbess of Kirklees Hall nunnery. It has been claimed that the traditional site of Robin's grave shows evidence that he still lurks there as a vampire.

9 KNARESBOROUGH, YORKSHIRE Mother Shipton's Cave was the 1488 birthplace of Ursula Shipton, England's most famous prophetess. The local tourist industry plays up this connection, even though Shipton's best-known prophecies were in fact composed by a Mr Hindle in 1871.

10 LONG MARSTON, YORKSHIRE Site of Cromwell's victory at the battle of Marston Moor, 1644. His ghost is said to haunt the Old Hall he used as his HQ, while various phantoms of the defeated Royalist soldiers have been seen in the area.

11 PENDLE, LANCASHIRE Scene in 1612 of one of England's

most notorious witch trials, which resulted in the conviction and execution of 10 locals.

12 LAMBTON CASTLE, NEAR PENSRAW, CO. DURHAM

A strange worm thrown into the castle well grew huge enough to ravage the area and to sleep coiled three times around Lambton (or Worm) Hill. The heir to the castle finally killed it with the help of a witch, but broke his bargain by refusing to kill the first creature he met thereafter – his own father. Ever since, the Lambton family has been cursed with bad luck and violent deaths.

13 TODMORDEN, YORKSHIRE In the 1980s this small Pennine mill town was a hotspot for UFO-related activity. Best known is the case of PC Alan Godfrey, who in 1980 had a close encounter with an alien craft.

HEXHAM HEADS



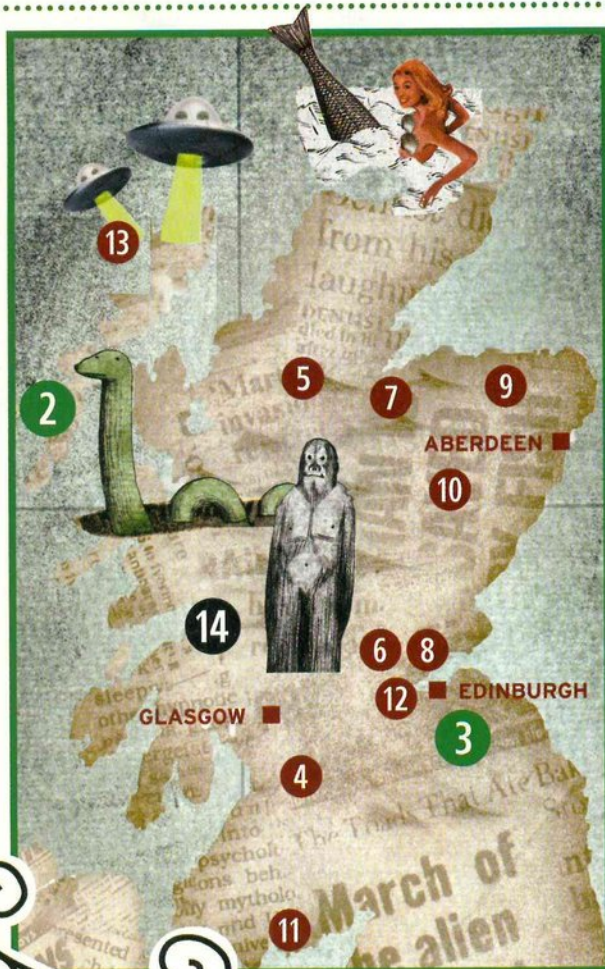
FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / PAUL SCRETON

SCOTLAND



GORDON RUTTER IS YOUR GUIDE

known that they have a whole tourist industry based around them, and watching non-foresight reactions to some of the tales told is a pleasant pastime in its own right. Whether in the centre of Edinburgh or in the midst of the Highlands and Islands, there is something of interest for foresights of every shape and shade; here are some of the more famous... and also some of the more intriguing places; the two don't always go hand in hand...



1 THE FLANNAN ISLE Lighthouse (OFF MAP)

A mysterious disappearance, a lonely lighthouse, and a tale that inspired a classic poem and an even better episode of *Dr Who*... this place has it all!

The Flannan Isles Lighthouse is situated in the Atlantic Ocean (on the island of Eilan Mor), 20 miles (32km) from the Outer Hebrides, and it first saw service in December 1899 after a series of shipwrecks in the area. But it wasn't until December 1900 that the events which would bring the lighthouse both fame and notoriety took place. Joseph Moore, returning to the lighthouse on Boxing Day, expected to be met by his colleagues Thomas Marshall, James Ducat and Donald McArthur. It had been noticed that the light had not been lit since 15 December, but bad weather delayed Moore's return. In true mysterious disappearance fashion, the table was set for a meal, the fire was cold and the only disturbance was a single overturned chair. The oilskins of two of the three keepers were missing and the log up to the 15th talked of great storms, great worries and much praying. A small island of 40

acres (16ha) provided little opportunity for the men to hide, and the chances of all three going out in a fierce storm and being swept away by waves were certainly small for such experienced keepers. No answers have been found, but everything from sea monsters to ET's have been suggested.

*Aye: though we hunted high and low,
And hunted every-where,
Of the three men's fate we found no trace
Of any kind in any place,
But a door ajar, and an untouch'd meal,
And an overtoppled chair.*
— from *Flannan Isle* by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

2 NUNTON, BENBECULA

For the cryptozoologists we have a piece of evidence waiting to be unearthed – evidence that would prove the existence of an apparently mythical creature. A short trip to Nunton on Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides and a quick bit of digging in the right spot will provide the proof for the reality of the mermaid!

In 1830, some women on the shore noticed a mermaid playing

HAUNTED PUBS

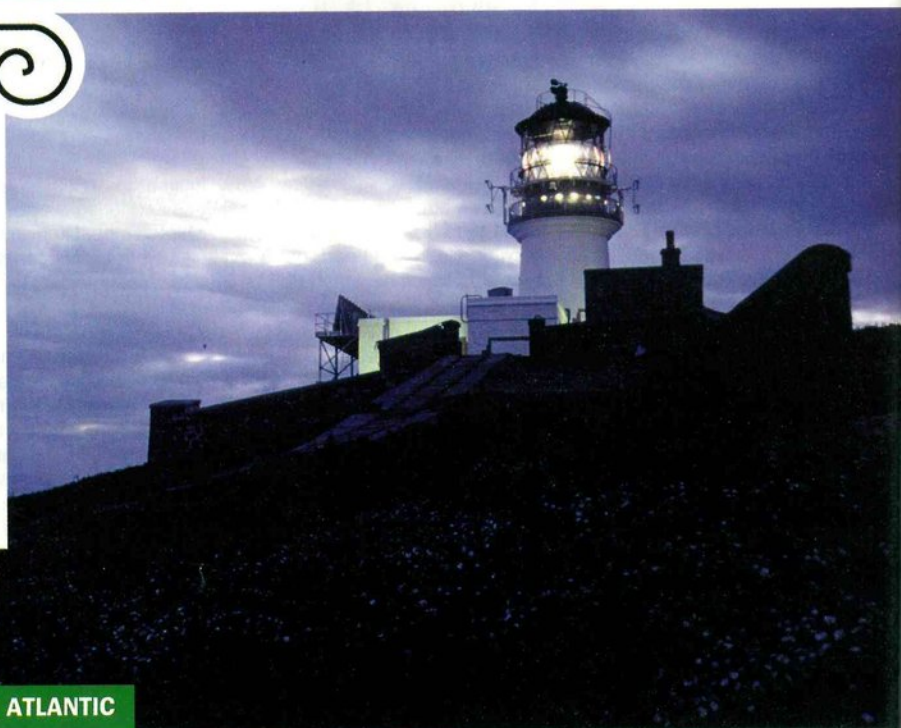
14 THE COYLET INN

This seventeenth-century coaching inn is home to the 'Blue Boy', the spirit of a young male guest who sleepwalked into the nearby loch. When his body was found the next morning it was blue with cold. He returns periodically, looking for his mother, and leaves wet footprints on the pub floor.

LOCH ECK, ARGYLL
TEL: 01369 840426

CHARLES TAIT

FLANNAN ISLE LIGHTHOUSE, NORTH ATLANTIC



SIDELINES

HAIRY DANCERS

WE Thorner was walking along the cliffs of the Orcaidan island of Hoy during World War II when he came across a group of strange hairy men dancing wildly. He thought they might have been members of an unknown pagan tribe.

MORE MONSTERS

Nessie, one of Scotland's most famous exports, is not alone. There are also strong monster traditions at Loch Morar and Loch Shiel on the west coast. Morag, the Morar monster, has been photographed and once collided with a fisherman's boat.

EXTRA EXTRA HEADLINES FROM SCOTLAND

JELLYFISH SHUT DOWN NUCLEAR STATION

Glasgow Herald, 13 Sept 1991

NUCLEAR RABBITS DON'T EXIST

Dundee Courier and Advertiser, 4 Sep 2003

NESSIE HOAX PHOTO



CALLANISH, OUTER HEBRIDES
This stone formation contains 48 megaliths in a complex cross pattern, on the western side of the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides.

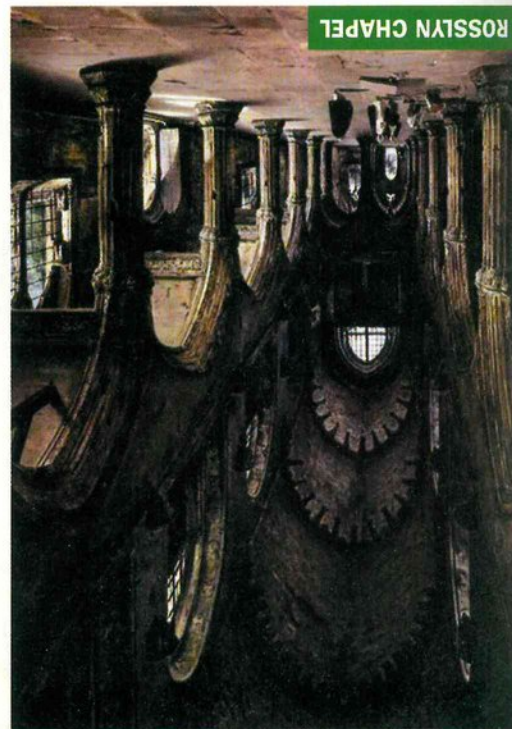
ROSSLYN CHAPEL, LOTHIAN

The 1960s. This is one of many sightings of mermaids and mermaid-like creatures from the Western Isles of Scotland.

Some six and a half miles (10.5km) from the centre of Edinburgh, this is a spot that has achieved an even greater prominence of late, courtesy of *The Da Vinci Code*, and even if you didn't enjoy Dan Brown's blockbuster, Rosslyn Chapel is still well worth a visit. Much has been written about Rosslyn and if it's all true, then Rosslyn Chapel is sitting on top of a repository of artefacts larger than the warehouse seen at the end of Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Indeed, from the Ark of the Covenant to the embalmed body of Jesus Christ (or possibly just his head), from the Holy Grail (take your pick on what you think the Grail is – they've all been proven to be at Rosslyn at one time or another) to the hidden mysteries of the Knights Templar, they're all there. Built in the 15th century, and some 40ft (12m) wide by 100ft (30m) long, Rosslyn contains more carvings than many cathedrals. Over 100 'green men' are carved into the Chapel as well as camels, demons, apparent Masonic symbols and species from the New World, thus showing that Columbus was only the last man to discover America.

Rosslyn is currently undergoing renovation (a massive canopy might spoil the view of the Chapel as a whole, but it does offer unprecedented views of the structure and carvings on the roof), and while the ban on excavations continues, mysteries will still be seized on by an ever-growing cottage industry – whether you choose to believe in them or not.



ROSSLYN CHAPEL

and combing her long hair, but she evaded all attempts to coax her ashore and to capture her. A young boy in the party threw stones, one of which struck the mermaid on the head and she disappeared into the water. A couple of days later, her body was washed ashore and the townspeople were aghast at what they had done. The mermaid had the upper body of a small child and the lower part was described as being like a large salmon, but without the scales. A small coffin was hastily constructed, the body wrapped in a shawl and the whole was then buried in a Christian ceremony above the high-water mark. Some actually claim the poor creature was buried in the cemetery and one folklorist reports that he himself saw the grave in

LOCH NESS, HIGHLAND

THE ELECTRIC BRAE, Ayrshire Located on the A719 between Groy and Dunre, this is, admittedly, an easily explained optical illusion, but it's still cool – leave your car in neutral and it rolls uphill!

REGION famed for its monster, but also features the former home of Aleister Crowley (Boleskine House), stone circles and waiting Nessie researchers.

BONNYBRIDGE, EAST LOTHIAN

home of Councilor Billy Buchanan and over 2,000 eye witnesses to UFOs.

EDINBURGH

Home of more ghosts than you can shake a stick at, fairy coffins, mermaids and, of course, the Edinburgh Fortean Society.

BENNACHIE, ABERDEENSHIRE

A pair of giants – Jock O'North and rival Jock O'Bennachie – had a fight over a girl, which has left a stone with an enormous handprint and a similarly gigantic footprint on it.

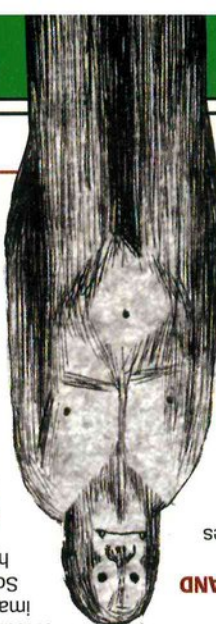
GLAMIS CASTLE, GRAMPIAN REGION

The ancestral home of a reputed shape-shifting lizard also has hidden family secrets and rooms with walled-up relatives.

KERRICK, KIRKCUDBRIGHT Poltergeist activity started here in 1690; there's been so much activity one would think the village was built on a Native American burial ground.

DECHMONT LAW WOODS, LIVINGSTON, EAST LOTHIAN

The site of a UFO incident in 1979, and the first place to have a council-erected plaque to mark such an event.



NORTHERN IRELAND



1 BIG CATS IN BELFAST, BALLYBOGEY AND BEYOND

In recent years, the province has at least become something of a world leader in out-of-place animals and escapees, particularly big cats. Indeed, such things have a long and distinguished history in Belfast in particular. In the late 1940s, a loyalist gun-runner called "Buck" Alec Robinson returned to Belfast after several years travelling in Canada and Australia (avoiding assassination rather than broadening his mind). Evidently he was no longer *persona non grata*, as he was subsequently given to parading around Belfast with a pair of toothless lions he had acquired on his travels; where else could he have lived but Tiger's Bay, in the north of the city?

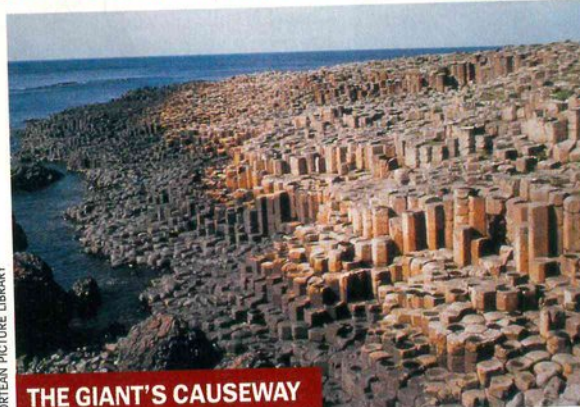
Further afield, and several decades later, in August 2002, pawprints were found near the town of Portballintrae and identified as belonging to a mountain lion or puma. This was a popular tourist destination at the height of its season, so sightings proved plentiful, eventually numbering in the dozens. More concrete evidence was also easy to come by, as the animal savaged a number of sheep during its run of notoriety.

Incredibly, the following month, an RSPCA operation aimed at capturing the cat turned up evidence that it had a friend; a black panther was also reported to be patrolling in the vicinity of nearby Ballybogy. The RSPCA even felt confident in



JOE MCNALLY IS YOUR GUIDE

Northern Ireland is not, in fact, particularly weird. From my own memories, growing up in the province, it seemed blanketed in one of those anti-anomaly fields which famously surround fortran seekers, keeping high strangeness at arm's length. Even UFOs have been thin in the air – perhaps deterred by British army helicopters – and sizeable bodies of water, such as the immense Lough Erne, have remained frustratingly monster-free. Possibly the province's history over the last 40 or so years has given its inhabitants plenty of other things to worry about.



THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

claiming that the animals had been released in the town of Bushmills – home to the famous distillery – in July, which suggests that authorities knew a good deal more than

they were willing to admit. Meanwhile, a calf was reportedly attacked two counties away in Tyrone; this has yet to be adequately explained...

Such unusual mobility seems characteristic of Northern Ireland's big cats. When a tigress was reported to have escaped from Belfast Zoo in January 1994, it was sighted within days at dozens of locations, covering most of the province. These sightings lost some credibility when the tigress's body was found in the moat of its

enclosure.

Belfast Zoo does seem to have problems in holding on to its animals. In 1999, one of the zoo's red pandas escaped from its enclosure, followed by another in 2002; the second animal later returned, but the first presumably remains at large. This was a shame, as they made a theoretical breeding pair, and it would be nice to think that red pandas might join the wallabies which apocryphally escaped from the zoo during WWII and established a colony in the heavily-wooded hillside surrounding the zoo.

Yet another escapee hit the headlines earlier this year. A colobus monkey nicknamed Mojo took off from his enclosure – a departure precipitated, if the papers are to be believed, by an argument with his father. He returned within a week, but not before putting in appearances in several gardens in the vicinity of the zoo, much to the delight of local children. The story doesn't have an entirely happy ending, however. The zoo is currently trying to place Mojo with another zoo, since his antisocial behaviour has put his life in danger should he remain in Belfast. Apparently smoking isn't the only bad habit zoo primates can pick up from the locals.

MORE REGIONAL WEIRDNESS

2 THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY, CO. ANTRIM

One of the province's great natural phenomena, it has a rich mythological significance and is dear to the heart of many a *Fortean Times* reader thanks to its starring role on the front cover of Led Zep's *Houses of the Holy*...

3 SPRINGHILL, LONDONDERRY

Once described as "the prettiest house in Ulster", Springhill is nevertheless reputed to be haunted by Olivia, second wife of George Lennox-Conyngham, who died away with himself in 1816; why she, rather than he, got to haunt the place is anybody's guess.

4 CRICKET FIELD, SION MILLS, CO. TYRONE

A chap who dropped dead at a cricket match here is said to appear each night in his whites, carrying a bat.

5 DUNDERMOT MOUND, BALLYMENA, CO. ANTRIM

Reputed to be a Buffy-like gateway to hell; occasionally it opens up and spews forth soul-hungry demons.

6 DRUMBEG CHURCHYARD, CO. ANTRIM

A strange ball of light has often been seen dancing about the headstones.

7 DREE HILL ROAD BRIDGE, FINNIS, CO. DOWN

The bridge was once said to be home to an evil spirit, which was subsequently trapped in a bottle by a priest and placed in the sycamore that still stands nearby.

HAUNTED PUBS

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Irish News, late 1995

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Belfast Community Telegraph, 8 May 2002

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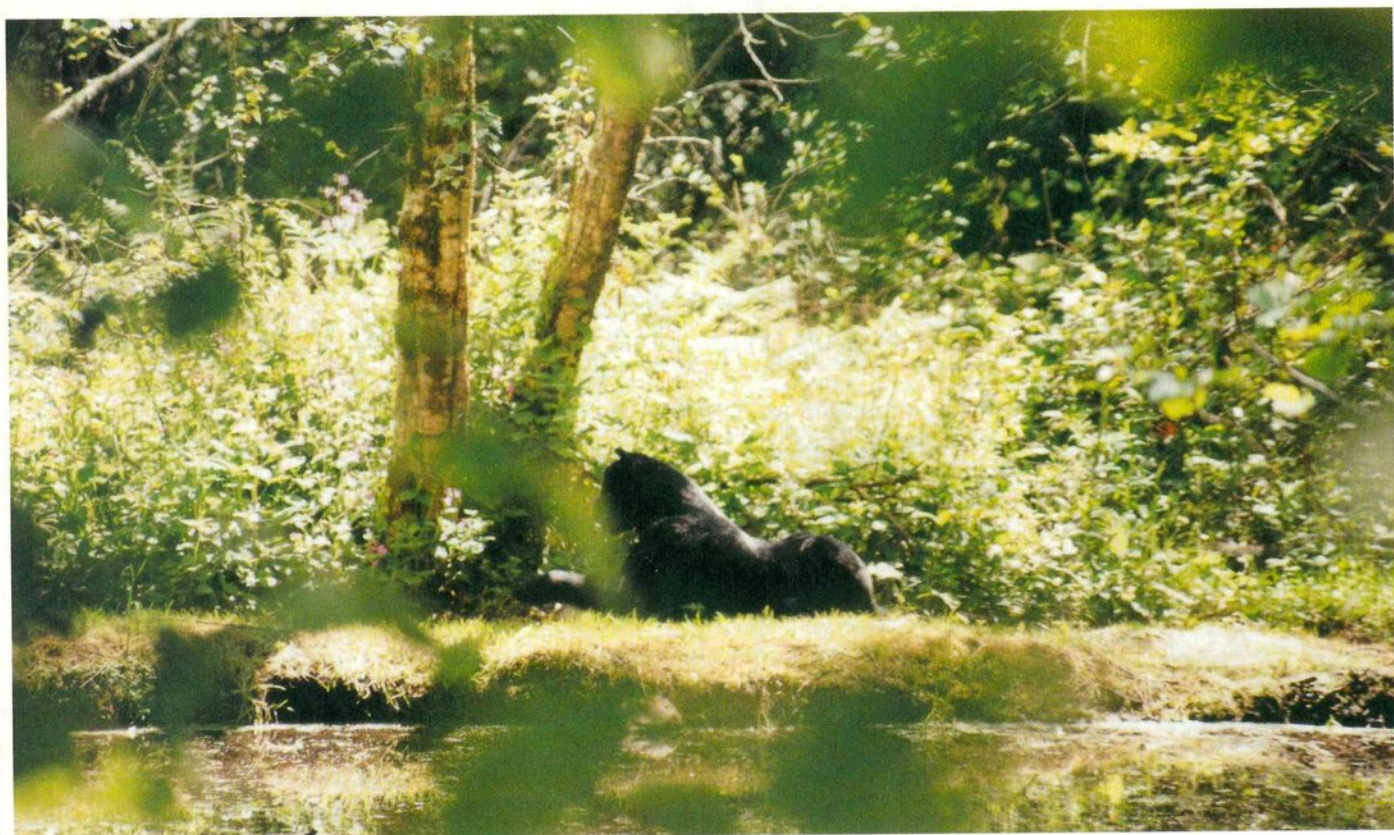


66. Beast of Cwmbran

News coverage of a recent Big Cat sighting intrigued **CHRIS MOISER** – he could have sworn he'd seen that particular creature somewhere before. Along with colleague Paul Crowther, he set about recreating the incident.

photographic consultant to the Scottish Big Cat Society and the Centre for Fortean Zoology) and I looked at the photo in detail and sent a report to the newspaper concerned. Our criticism of the photograph was not particularly well received – in fact, we were labelled Mr Pompous and Mr Arrogant. However, we were invited to the newspaper office concerned and had a pleasant lunch with the editor and sub-editor. We were then shown some other pictures which were not to be published (they identified the location) – these did provide a size reference – and I was able to calculate that the animal, far from being a puma, was the size of a large domestic cat.

Certain technical irregularities in the picture were also satisfactorily explained at this meeting. The photographer did not have a telephoto lens or an expensive camera, so he had brought together his camera and a pair of binoculars, in a somewhat precarious manner, to obtain the picture (definitely nine out of ten for effort!). From the



PAUL CROWTHER

Since the 1960s, one of the major challenges for European cryptozoologists has been to confirm the existence of exotic or alien big cats (ABCs) breeding in the wild in the United Kingdom. To the hard-line sceptics, only an actual cat will do, dead or alive, be it road-kill, freshly shot or hissing in a cage-trap. Most people, and much of the national media, would probably be satisfied with a photograph – or, preferably a series of photographs, ideally with size references and some locally recognisable landmark in the background. And, if there have been multiple sightings of the Beast of Bodmin, Bont or Bexleyheath in the area

where the picture was taken over the last few years, so much the better.

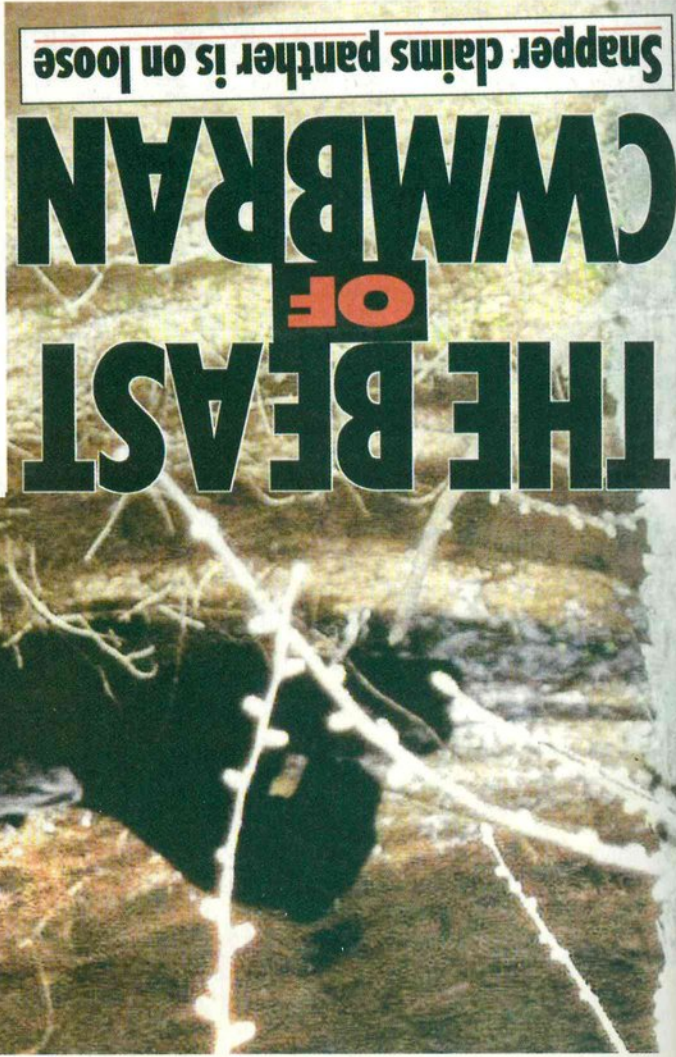
Unfortunately the interest of the media – together with the fees that may be earned from such “photographic proof” – has, over the years, tempted a number of people to produce fake photographs.

One such photograph appeared on the front page of several newspapers in the South West of England a few years ago.¹ It was claimed that it proved the existence of pumas in Cornwall. The location of the picture and the name of the photographer were kept secret, supposedly to ensure the animal's safety. Photographer Paul Crowther (also the

ABOVE: One of Paul Crowther's photos showing the cuddly toy panther lurking in the woods. This shot has been left-right reversed to emphasise the similarity to the posture in the national and local press.

zoological point of view, the main problem was that, although the subject was clearly feline, it was not a puma; it was most likely an Abyssinian Cat, one of the larger and wilder-looking breeds of domestic cat.

The newspaper published our comments, to which the still anonymous photographer responded, still claiming to have photographed one of Cornwall's large exotic cats. There the matter rested, at least as far as this cat was concerned, for over a year. In the meantime, the publicity we had generated led to several of Paul's photography students admitting to him that they had faked (using cut-outs)





CHRIS MOISER

been so affected that the post-fracture portion of the tail would probably have been lost through poor circulation and necrosis. The cat's lower jaw also looked odd; the photo gave the impression that the animal was facing away from the photographer, but from such an angle the jaw was too long and straight.

There was also a problem with the story. I found it hard to see how the photographer could have got within 15 or even 30 feet of a wild black panther, particularly one that was feeding. These animals have a much better sense of smell than do humans, not to mention superior hearing and sight.

My greatest problem with the photograph, though, was that I recognised the "animal". I recognised it because I had nearly bought the same one myself in Exeter only 16 months previously.

In the run-up to Christmas 2003, I had seen a market stall selling large cuddly toys; the pumas and black leopards were almost life-size, and even the lions and tigers were large. From a distance, they were quite realistic, and it was clear that a number of passing dogs had thought they were real and had been very scared. The prices were reasonable and I would have bought one had I not been using public transport – struggling with a three-foot leopard on the bus during the height of the pre-Christmas shopping rush wasn't an appealing prospect.

I remember thinking at the time that, if shot slightly out of focus in a suitable setting, these cuddly big cats could pass for the real thing... and that it was probably only a matter of time before one of them was used in a hoax.

A telephone call to the *Sun* features

Couple believe 'big cat' may be missing big dog

A GWENT couple believe the latest "big cat" sighting in woodland outside Cwmbran could be their missing dog.

When Richard and Myfanwy Bowen saw the picture taken by Norman Evans they thought it looked just like their black,

flat-coat retriever, Sable. "I thought, 'That's no panther, but it could be our dog,'" said Mr Bowen, of Llanfrehfa.

Sable went missing on November 5 after being frightened by fireworks. Mr Bowen said: "The fireworks were let off before we could put her in and she ran off."

Mr and Mrs Bowen have spent £500 in their bid to find their much-loved dog, putting up posters, advertising extensively and offering a reward. They have had one sighting from a reliable source in the Henllys area. Their hopes were raised when they saw the "panther" photograph. "The chances of it being a large black cat are probably a million to one, but the chances of it being a large black dog are a lot less," Mr Bowen said.

They also checked with a local vet, who said it was possible that Sable, who weighs five stone, had survived in the woods for some



Top, the photo of the 'big cat' and below that, the Bowen's missing retriever, Sable

are members of the Gundog group and have intelligent expressions. Their tails are

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My problem was that I recognised the animal

desk produced a rather curt explanation that the paper would never have published the picture without getting it verified by an expert. Paul had better luck with the picture desk, which eventually confirmed that the paper had looked at the memory card

TOP: The cuddly toy as it looked during unwrapping after postal delivery.

ABOVE: More of the press coverage of the sighting – now including a new and perhaps surprising identification.

from the camera, and that a fee had been paid for the picture.

The *Mirror* quite helpfully provided me with the email address of their reporter. I subsequently emailed both newspapers, briefly setting out my qualifications and experience and then giving my opinion and the reasons why I had come to the conclusion that I had about the animal. Neither paper replied. Paul and I discussed whether we should send out a press release detailing our findings, but then decided to see if we could do better.

By this time, the cuddly toys had disappeared from the local area, but with help from Mark Fraser of the British Big Cat Research Group we eventually found one in Scotland, which was despatched by post to me here in Devon.

On a sunny Tuesday in June, Paul and I travelled to Porfell Animal Land, just south of Bodmin Moor, and placed my new cuddly toy in the bushes. A recently deceased rabbit, later to be given as lunch to some of Porfell's caracals, was used as a prop. The resulting photos were subsequently shown to friends, with no explanation; the majority thought that Paul had finally succeeded in photographing the Beast of Bodmin, after 10 years on the case.

So why did we do it? The problem with newspapers publishing fake photographs – when they are not recognised as such – is that can have longer-term effects than just selling a few tabloids.

The area of South Wales where the alleged panther photo was taken, despite being a popular recreational area, has reportedly since been avoided by people who actually believed the story; locals with guns also now have a plausible excuse for shooting domestic or wild animals in the area.

Additionally, such photos – which many readers will recognise as fakes – detract from the hard-won credibility of legitimate cryptozoological researchers. I suppose it also offends my sense of justice that a photographer can so easily earn a fee for photographing a toy – particularly when I know several serious big cat researchers who have spent hundreds of hours doing fieldwork and have got nothing but colds and flu for their efforts... **FT**

NOTES

1 The *Cornish Guardian*, 27 November 1997.

2 "The Beast", *Science Week 2000*, Goschen Centre, Plymouth College of Further Education, 24 Mar 2000 – transcript available at www.pcfce.ac.uk/cats.

3 The toy is manufactured by Ostoy Trading BV of Ridderkerk in Holland.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



CHRIS MOISER is a zoologist and lecturer. He has made a detailed study of the UK's Alien Big Cat phenomena and has written two books on the subject. His novel based on the Beast of Exmoor will be published later this year.

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Doubting Tiffany

Charles Fort would only consider joining a fortean organisation if it wasn't named after him. That didn't stop his admirers going right ahead and starting one. **DOUG SKINNER** traces the early days, the dissent and the heresies of the Fortean Society through its eccentric and iconoclastic founder, actor and author Tiffany Thayer.

Charles Fort has often been described as a hermit, but he was not wanting for fans and friends. Theodore Dreiser befriended him early in both their careers. As editor of *Smith's Magazine*, Dreiser bought some of his short stories: droll, salty tales of newspaper life and the poor Irish of the Hell's Kitchen neighbourhood in Manhattan. He encouraged Fort's literary experiments, and invited him to parties (to one honouring Edgar Lee Masters, for example). Fort, in turn, invited Dreiser to his home for beer, cheese, and "to-peach-o," a tomato-peach preserve whose recipe is now, sadly, lost.

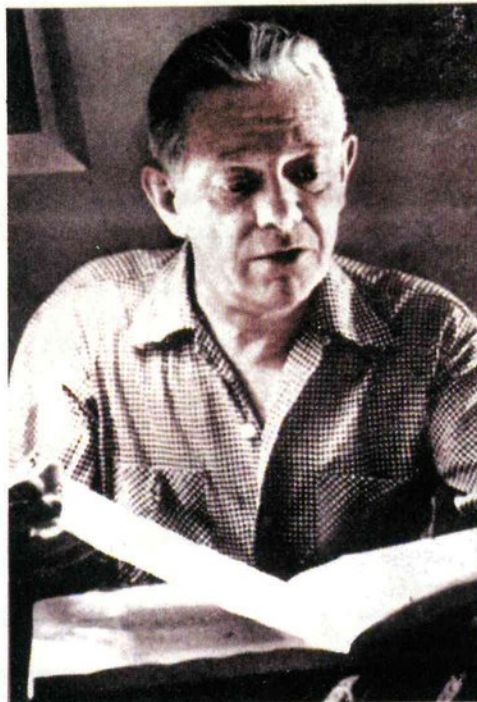
Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in 1900 to both scandal and acclaim. Fort's first, *The Outcast Manufacturers*, came out in 1909. It's been eclipsed by his later, more radical books, but it's an odd and imaginative work in its own right: an almost plotless study of a group of Dickensian eccentrics, written in a vivid impressionistic style. The reviews weren't bad, either: the *New York Times* called it "A somewhat unusual story... the shiftless life of the crowded district is set forth with a great deal of skill... the dialogue is unusually clever."¹

Dreiser went on to write more novels, to ever greater success. Fort wrote and destroyed many manuscripts; one can only wonder how he would have developed as a novelist. But, as the magazine you're holding in your hands attests, he had other ideas. Prompted by what he liked to call "strange orthogenetic gods," he mixed philosophical speculation, obsessive research, and satire into an orthogenetic to-peach-o that he entitled *X*. Dreiser loved it, and tried to interest publishers, only to have Fort recall it and scrap it. After a few false starts, Fort reworked it into *The Book of the Damned*; Dreiser talked his publisher, Boni and Liveright, into printing it; and it came out in 1919.

The critics were mostly distressed. The *Times* seems to have preferred *The Outcast Manufacturers*. "Painfully and boresomely commonplace," sniffed its nameless critic. "There are persons, perhaps living in Greenwich Village, who may enjoy puzzling through it." "Propaganda of systematic idiocy," pronounced the *Nation*.²

But off in Illinois, far from Greenwich

After The Book of the Damned, critics were mostly distressed



"Your Secretary" – Fortean Society founder Tiffany Thayer in 1956, aged 54

Village, Ben Hecht was delighted. Hecht still hadn't gotten to his first novel; he was writing lively, jazzy stories and articles for the *Chicago Daily News*: "I am the first disciple of Charles Fort. He has made a terrible onslaught upon the accumulated lunacy of fifty centuries... Henceforth I am a Fortean."³

Booth Tarkington, Pulitzer Prizewinner, author of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Penrod,

and other novels of the Midwest, was just as amazed by Fort. "Who in the name of frenzy is Charles Fort?" he wrote to *The Bookman*.

"People must turn to look at his head as he walks down the street; I think it's a head that would emit noises and explosions, with copper flames playing out from the ears."⁴ He was so impressed that he wrote the introduction for Fort's next book, *New Lands*, in 1923.

The critical response was again mixed. The *Boston Transcript* called it "an amazingly interesting book"; the *New York Times* was again unhappy, noting, with a limpid obtuseness

toward methodological satire, that "Mr. Fort's favorite method of proof seems to consist in lining up an array of data supporting his beliefs, and in matching it with a cohort of carefully selected errors in the field of orthodox astronomy."⁵

New Lands did, however, net Fort another ardent fan: a young actor and writer with the improbable name of Tiffany Ellsworth Thayer. Thayer wrote to Fort in 1924; they corresponded; and finally met in 1930.

Thayer was only 22 when he contacted Fort. He was born in Freeport, Illinois, to a couple of actors, Sybil Farrar and Elmer Ellsworth Thayer, who divorced when he was five. At 15, he quit school; he worked by turns as an actor, reporter, and used-book clerk in Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland. By the age of 16, he was touring as the teenage hero in the Civil War drama "The Coward". And he was, as he later recalled, at the *Chicago Examiner* when Ben Hecht was at the *News*, and famed critic Burton Rascoe at the *Tribune*.

In 1926, Thayer moved to New York City to boost his acting career; but fell back on writing, first as a copywriter, then as advertising manager for the Literary Guild. And he started contributing to pulp magazines, often under the names Elmer Ellsworth, Jr and John Doe. *The*

Brainless Informer, serialised in *Detective Story Magazine* in 1929, is a fair example of his approach to fiction-writing. To borrow an old French expression, he was not making lace.

The books started arriving in 1930. That year, his first novel, *Thirteen Men*, became a best-seller. It was a definite novelty: each chapter told the life story of one juror, with the final chapter a monologue from the killer on trial. By

ABOVE: A selection of covers of Tiffany Thayer's *Doubt*.
LEFT: The Fortean Society Magazine.



all phases of life... To urge authors, publishers, and users of text-books to adopt the practice of teaching the suspension of final judgment or dogmatic belief... To perpetuate dissent." Thayer later amplified that last goal: "To provide the means for the perpetuation of dissent from any and all dogma as long as time shall last." "Dissent, as we shall see, was sacred to Thayer.

Members met informally in homes or restaurants, particularly the Brahmins in Yorkville, New Jersey. Thayer usually led the discussions.

Fort had other things to do. He was busy with his next book, *Wild Talents*, which he again entrusted to Kendall and Sussman. He finished it just in time; he died as the first copies were coming off the press.

The Society lay fallow for a while. Thayer moved to Hollywood to try to break into the movies. He started off with a flourish: three of his novels were filmed in 1932. After that, he wrote numerous unproduced screenplays for various studios; he was particularly disappointed about *Fig Leaves Burned Away*, a comedy about a nudist colony written for Cecil B. DeMille. His dialogue made a sequence in *If I Had a Million*. He landed only one acting part as well, in *The Devil on Horseback*, in 1936. Thayer himself called the film "bad"; it was mostly a vehicle for Lily Damita, who played a movie star torn between the petulant Fred Keating (also an active Fortean Society member, incidentally) and a Mexican bandito balladeer, the aptly named Del Campo. Thayer portrayed a brash press agent, Wilbur Hitchcock. He attacks his part with cheerful gusto, mining what comedy he can from acting hungover and saddle-sore.



spirit. Harry Leon Wilson, former editor of the satirical weekly *Puck* and author of comic novels like *Rugles of Red Cap* and *Merton of the Movies*, was a friend of Tarkington. Alexander Woolcott is somewhat of a surprise on the list; his drama reviews, celebrity puff pieces, and sentimental radio broadcasts were all fairly conventional. But he also had an unorthodox background, having been raised in a Fournierist collective, and was a friend of Hecht and Tarkington. J. David Stern, publisher of the *Philadelphia Record*, rounded out the list – and, not incidentally, bought the dinner.

Not all of them attended that first meeting; some were probably more active than others. Others in Fort's circle refused to join, like Benjamin De Casseres, the splendidly gloomy author of *Anathema* and *The Shadow-Eater*, and Fort's usual partner for his preposterous board game, super-checkers.



well. "To widen the scope of Fortean inquiry to more anomalies. But he had bigger goals as the preservation of his notes and the gathering included the promotion of Fort and his works, Thayer framed the aims of the society; they refused to join, like Benjamin De Casseres, the splendidly gloomy author of *Anathema* and *The Shadow-Eater*, and Fort's usual partner for his preposterous board game, super-checkers.

Thayer's admission, its fast, breezy style was patterned after Ben Hecht. It may also be the first truly Fortean novel: there are no anomalies, but the interconnectedness of the jurors' lives is a constant motif; furthermore, the murderer blames his nihilism on Fort, and warns parents to keep his writings from their children. "And *The Book of the Damned*, by Charles Fort, for there is disclosed the rottenness of the root of Science... By all means forbid him this parade of pallid data relating to rainfalls of butter and porkchops. It is too heady for mere men."

Meanwhile, Fort was proving too heady for mere publishers. Boni and Liveright dropped him, and he had trouble placing his next book, *God and the Fishmonger*. Thayer introduced him to Claude Kendall, who had published *Thirteen Men*, and Aaron Sussman, who had designed it; they came to an agreement. Kendall disliked the title, though, so others were proposed – *Skyward Hol*, *God Is an Idiot*, *If the Time Has Come*, *The Time Has Come*. Finally, Thayer hit on *Lo!* It was published in 1931, with an exuberant introduction by Thayer and flamboyant illustrations by Alexander King.

Lo! was probably Fort's most popular book – it's still many Forteans' favourite. The reviews were positively joyful. Burton Rascoe – tireless exponent of the fresh in letters, catalyst of the Chicago Renaissance, Dreiser's first biographer – said: "In any mood your temperament dictates and whatever way you read it, it is a good book." And the penny finally dropped at the *Times*, with Maynard Shipley crowing, "Reading Fort is a ride in a comet."

Thayer – who had, after all, helped considerably with the book – decided to form a Fortean Society as a sort of publication party. Fort wanted nothing to do with it: "Call it the Interplanetary Exploration Society and I'll come in, but not if it has my name on it".⁸ Nevertheless, the Society was launched at the Savoy-Plaza Hotel in New York, on 26 January 1931, and Fort was tricked into attending.

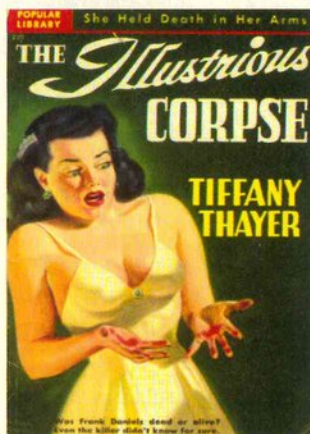
The board of "Founders" that Thayer assembled was an illustrious one: Dreiser, Hecht, Tarkington, Rascoe, Sussman... John Cowper Powys, prolific critic, novelist, poet, and memoirist, also signed up; his oddball fiction and iconoclastic criticism reveal a kindred

THIRTEEN MEN (1930)

Twelve jurors – and one serial killer unhinged by frog falls.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS CORPSE (1930)

A screwball mystery, mostly in dialogue, about switched and misidentified corpses. Movie version: *Strangers in the Evening* (1932), w. Eugene Pallette & ZaSu Pitts.



EYE-WITNESS! (1930, as John Doe)

A hard-boiled crime story about rival gangs in Manhattan.

THE GREEK (1931)

A handsome descendant of Pericles becomes Emperor of the US, with a little help from Tiffany Thayer.

CALL HER SAVAGE (1931)

"The story of a cat and cobra beauty who burned all men with pleasure and pain!" Movie w. Clara Bow (1932).

FIVE MILLION IN CASH (1932, AS OB KING)

A man wakes up with a hangover, no memory of the night before, and \$5M scattered on the floor. (Listed in some catalogues as by Thayer, but I can't verify it. He did use other pseudonyms, and it's certainly Thayeresque, so maybe.)

THIRTEEN WOMEN (1932)

A woman incites 12 of her college classmates to suicide with artfully manipulative correspondence. Movie with Myrna Loy and Irene Dunn (1932).

THREE SHEET (1932)

The story of two brothers, one raised agnostic, the other Christian; the former becomes a model citizen, the latter a ham actor and syphilitic sex fiend.

ONE WOMAN (1933)

A reporter reconstructs a dead woman's life from her address book. Movie version: *Chicago Deadline* (1949), w. Alan Ladd. TV movie version: *Fame is the Name of the Game* (1966), w. Anthony Franciosa.



Above: Tiffany Thayer, in his only film role, as brash press agent Wilbur Hitchcock in *The Devil on Horseback* (1936).

He had better luck with his novels, which he cranked out tirelessly throughout the 1930s. None is in print today, but they were popular in their time, and cheap used copies are plentiful. They're often quite entertaining; if nothing else, Thayer had a lively style, a dirty mind, and a bone-deep contempt for all American institutions.

A few review quotes may capture the Tiffany bouquet: "a macabre sort of gaiety"; "done in a jazzy, sexy, suggestive way that is not pleasant"; "impudent and sometimes unduly coarse".¹⁰ Dorothy Parker mocked his smuttiness in a memorable review in the *New Yorker*: "Mr. Thayer, it is deplorably unnecessary to explain, has achieved great prominence in that school of American authors who might be described as the boys who ought to go regularly to a gym."¹¹

His most popular efforts were probably *Call Her Savage* and *One Woman*, both of which were made into movies, and sold in paperback into the Fifties. Latter-day fortuneans might prefer *Doctor Arnoldi*, a dark and often revolting fantasy about a world where nobody dies; it ends by comparing the overpopulated Earth to "a solid sphere of maggots". I have a soft spot for *Little Dog Lost*, in which a Hollywood director is so violently disgusted with society that he becomes a homicidal drifter; among other highlights, he compares Dreiser unfavourably with fellow fortunean Harry Leon Wilson, delivers lengthy tirades against American journalism, and defends Fort to a room of hostile professors as a 12-year-old girl genius cheers him on.

Little Dog Lost may have been more autobiographical than its readers realised; for Thayer too seems to have come to a crisis. He left Hollywood, and stopped writing novels. His fictional stand-in ends the book by deciding to found a satirical magazine, like Wilson's *Puck*. And that is, in a way, what Thayer did next.

Around 1936, he returned to the East Coast, and wrote to Dreiser that he wanted to start a Fortean Society magazine. Dreiser promptly resigned.

Undaunted, Thayer put out two issues, soberly entitled *The Fortean Society Magazine*, in 1937.

Thayer identified himself as an atheist, anarchist, and Pyrrhonist, and he was far more interested in



Dorothy Parker mocked Thayer's smuttiness

Fort's attacks on dogmatism than in his catalogues of anomalies. As he put it: "There's a lot more to Forteanism than just watching the papers for snail blizzards."¹² The ideals of Greek philosopher Pyrrho – the subjectivity of human knowledge and the practice of suspended judgment – were often invoked by early members.

The first issues of the magazine emphasised the intellectual calibre of the Society's founders (to show that Fort was not just a crank magnet), offered bursts of Thayer fustian ("This is not an enlightened age, you blithering idiots!"¹³), and scrutinised scientific expeditions for fraud and failure. It also printed Fort's notes. Thayer had custody of these, and continued to publish them throughout the run of the magazine. Many are simply records of volcanoes and earthquakes, somewhat tedious without Fort's explanations.

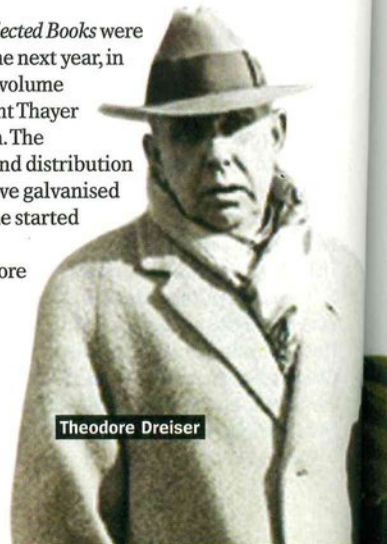
The third issue didn't appear until 1940. There was a change in tone: Thayer was no longer just attacking scientific expeditions, but exposing the sorry state of journalism and the threat that lie detectors posed to civil liberties. He predicted, portentously – and, as it happened, wrongly – that his outspokenness would land him in jail. He also promoted his baffling theory that all planets, including the Earth, are growing – slowly changing from cube to sphere to cube as they mature.

Fort's *Collected Books* were published the next year, in an omnibus volume with a fervent Thayer introduction. The promotion and distribution of it must have galvanised Thayer, for he started issuing the magazine more regularly.

The influence of the original founders



Ben Hecht



Theodore Dreiser

gradually waned. Woolcott quit in February 1942, perhaps in response to that year's January issue, in which Thayer charged Roosevelt with colluding with Japan (Woolcott preened himself on his social ties to the president). Harry Leon Wilson's son was a conscientious objector, so Thayer kept readers posted on his progress throughout the war. Other than that, the original group mostly bowed

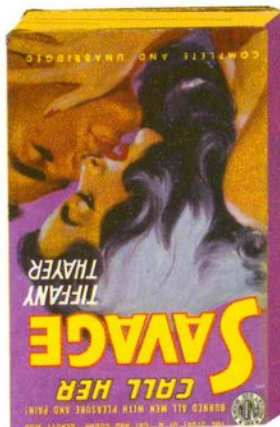
out. Instead, Thayer proposed a new roster of heretics, a "Fortean University": BJS Cahill, who designed the "Butterfly Map" of the world; Alfred Drayson, who postulated a secondary rotation of the Earth; George Gillette, who preached a spiral Universe; Ikromi, a Native American advocate; Alfred Korzybski, the originator of General Semantics; Henry Clifford Stuart, an eccentric economist. A great deal of space was also devoted to a serialised exposé of the Indian aristocracy, by one Kanhayalal Gamba.

Mostly, though, Thayer filled pages with his own opinions, which he summarised as: "Respect for authority is the most paralyzing, retarding, and degrading, enslaving, retrograding, and completely damning bit of mental conditioning that can be imposed upon human beings".¹⁴ And he gave the magazine a new name: *Doubt*.

It was a fitting title – "YS" ("Your Secretary," as Thayer invariably styled himself) doubted everything. Civil defence was a fraud. Lie detectors were a hoax. Tonilleries caused polio, and Salik's vaccine was a "nasty concoction". Both World Wars were frauds, a conspiracy between the Allies and the Axis. Atomic power was a hoax, because atoms didn't exist. Sputnik was a fake. UFOs were a scheme by the military to raise the defence budget. The papers (or "wypers," as he liked to call them) only printed lies. Higher maths was gibberish, a con game created by mathematicians. Marriage licenses should be abolished; demanding a rake-off for sexual relationships made the state into a pimp. Religion was a swindle. There was no gold at Fort Knox.

Vaccination and fluoridation caused disease. Air travel should be abolished – it was unsafe, and nobody did anything worthwhile with the time saved. And, again and again, all scientific research and expeditions were shameless frauds to steal money from taxpayers. He proposed a "Perpetual Peace Plan" to keep government spending at wartime levels without killing off 18-year-olds: a cyclotron in every high school, a telescope at every crossroads. The Society also promoted a kind of cultishness, with logos and paraphernalia, an official slogan ("Still alive – and kicking"), and a mascot: the Mamenken-Pis, the famed Brussels fountain of a young boy urinating. Thayer insisted on a 13-month calendar, with the year reckoned from the founding of the society, an innovation that irked members and non-members alike.

In fact, much of Thayer's content annoyed subscribers, although they often seemed to enjoy complaining. Some objected to the political content (which was



Alexander Woolcott

strictly ideological, and never about specific parties or candidates); others argued for more activism. Anti-clerical squibs and news about atheistic publications were always part of the editorial mix; a proposed blasphemous Christmas card, however, was vetoed by the members. (As one pointed out, Jesus had, if nothing else, stimulated perpetual dissent among his followers.)

Although Thayer wrote most of the copy, several members became regular contributors. Eric Frank Russell, author of the obviously Fortean science fiction novel *Snister Barrer* (1939, revised and expanded 1948) and later the nonfiction essay collection *Great World Mysteries* (1957), supplied a steady stream of British fortiana. Mary Winthrop Bonavia and Gertrude Hills also showered the Secretary with clippings. (Thayer didn't really like clippings, since he didn't believe in newspapers, but he couldn't run a Fortean publication without them.) Art Castillo's caustic and intricate cartoons provided most of the graphics.

names cropped up in *Doubt*, although it's hard to tell who was really a member, since Thayer automatically enrolled anyone who publicly contested anything about science, government, or religion. Nevertheless, a few members are worth mentioning. Pioneering Forteans Vincent Gaddis and Ivan Sanderson were on the rolls, as was Abraham Merritt, fantasy writer of the sensationalist *American Weekly*. Arthur Miller succeeded Burton Rascoe on the board. Both Frank Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller were members. Carefree Crosby promoted her pacifist and anti-nationalist projects, such as her campaign to declare a footprint at Delphi international territory. Henry Miller offered his watercolours for "any amount

of money. *Doubt* is still fun to read. Thayer's scattershot contrarianism has not always sat well with later Forteans. Nor has his framing of forteanism as a religion – "the religion of self-respect," he called it – since not everyone wants a religion. Taken on its own merits, though, *Doubt* is still a stimulating resource for unorthodox viewpoints; and Thayer, even at his crankiest, was buoyed by humour and intellectual curiosity.

During all of this, Thayer made his living in advertising. He wrote radio ads for J Walter Thompson, then Fall Mall cigarette jingles for Sullivan, Staufel & Bayles. He operated a private press, The Old Wine Press, to keep his novels in print (none of which, by the way, he ever pushed in *Doubt*). He wrote a play about the Mona Lisa, and tried (in vain, as far as I know) to get it produced; he edited a couple of humour anthologies and published adaptations of Rabalais and Dumas. His many hobbies included collecting rare books and first issues of magazines, painting, fencing, and playing the recorder (he owned 18 of



DOCTOR ARNOLDI (1933)

A dystopian fantasy of a deathless world. was the monkey's.

KINGS AND NUMBERS (1934)

A rambling, eccentric survey of Peniles and his descendants.

THE CLUCK ABROAD (1935)

A native Iowa librarian falls in love with a gay man, visits Europe, and marries a millionaire.



THE OLD GOAT (1937)

Several generations of an Illinois family, and their problems with casual sex, adultery, incest, venereal disease, and men-strual cramps.

ONE-MAN SHOW (1937)

After a near-fatal accident, a painter's talent blossoms; he suspects he's one of the walking dead.

LITTLE DOG LOST (1938)

A Hollywood director drops out many splenetic rants about American society.

TIFFANY THAYER'S THREE MUSKETEERS (1939)

Dumas with Thayer sauce.

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF GARGANTUA AND HIS SON PANTAGRUEL, EDITED FOR BOYS (1940)

Rabalais for kids; Thayer's own favourite.

33 SARDONICS I CAN'T FORGET (1946)

An anthology of stories and excerpts: Hecht, Bierce, Saki, et al.

"SAID" 800 WAYS (1946)

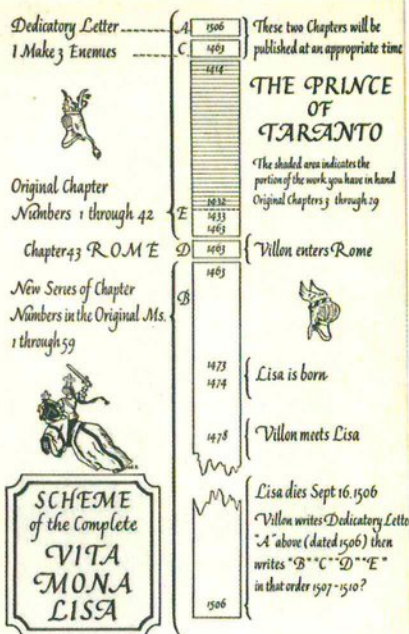
A pamphlet of synonyms for writers.

ADULTS' COMPANION (1948)

A collection of bawdy humour; Boccaccio, Voltaire, Congreve, et al.

MONA LISA, PART ONE: THE PRINCE OF TARANTO (1956)

1,267 pages of Neapolitan intrigue.



them). I can offer no revelations about his private life, except that he was married three times, the last time to a woman named Kathleen McMahon, had no children and liked to list his marital status as "nobody's business."

As it turned out, he also had a secret obsession that rivalled his enthusiasm for Fort. He hadn't abandoned fiction after all: from 1940 on, he was expanding his play on the *Mona Lisa* into what he hoped would be the longest novel ever written. The original conceit was to have the mediaeval outlaw poet François Villon explain *Mona Lisa's* smile. By the time he was finished, he had taught himself Italian, exhaustively researched 15th-century Naples, and spent over \$5,000 on books and translations. The result was a 46,000-page manuscript (all hand-written, for extra heroism) that is, one can safely say, unlike anything else ever committed to paper. The Dial Press undertook to actually print this mountain of verbiage; in 1956, American readers were confronted with *Mona Lisa Part One: The Prince of Taranto*, the first three volumes of a projected 21. The heroine was almost lost in the excitement; in fact, the published volumes don't even take us up to her grandfather.

The critical response veered between respect and horror, often in the same breath. Most reviewers praised its sweep, scholarship, and vivid characters, but disliked its "flagrant indecencies... and often tiresome smart-aleckness".¹⁵ According to *Time*, "a drool trickles from the wise-guy smoking-car prose," which was probably not meant as a compliment.¹⁶ *Newsweek* ended its review with the dictionary definition of "logorrhea". If you're curious, copies are still easy to find from used booksellers; my pristine boxed first edition set me back three dollars.

The rest of *Mona Lisa* remained in Thayer's files. He died in Nantucket, on 23 August 1959, of a heart attack. Like Fort, he was 57 when he died. *Doubt* perished with him, after 61 issues. Forteanes were left without a society until 1965, when Ron and Paul Willis started the

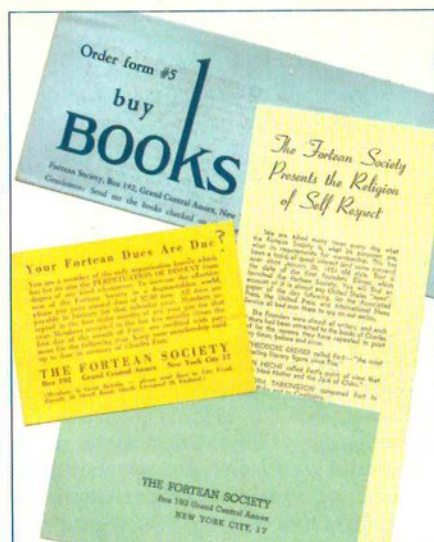
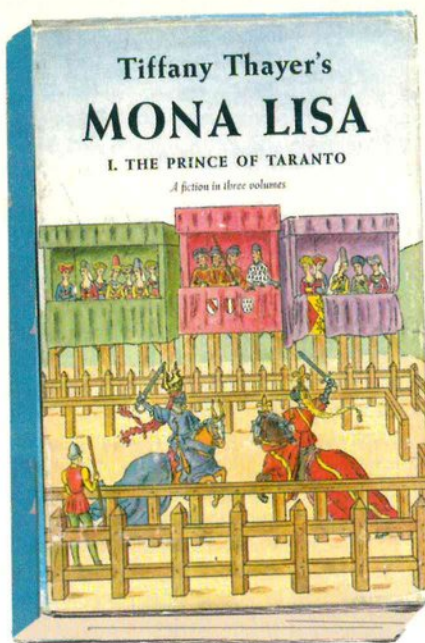
"I spit on the most sacred household idols"

International Fortean Organization (INFO), still flourishing in Baltimore under its current president, Phyllis Benjamin.

Many of Fort's fans were exasperated with Thayer, and Fort probably deserved a better spokesman than this boisterous potty-mouth. Still, Thayer was lively and funny and eloquent at his best, and his enthusiasm could be contagious. Despite his prodigious labours, he never took himself too seriously, either. In an interview with the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1956, he summed up his career: "This facetiousness of mine has kept me from being appraised on my skill with words. I spit on the most sacred household idols, and I

am 'that dirty boy'. But I can't help it. I am incorrigible. I like to give my friends a laugh—that's all. Literature? To hell with literature."¹⁷

Perhaps the most telling key to Thayer is hidden in his description of Fort, from his introduction to the *Collected Books*. Although others described Fort as a quiet or shy man (Dreiser compared him to Oliver Hardy), Thayer saw him as a swashbuckling knight, a roaring figure fit for armour. That may be what Thayer longed for, himself. He felt hampered by our milquetoast, puny era; he longed to steep himself in the brawling world of Rabelais and Villon, to ride off



LEFT: The overall plan for Thayer's history of *Mona Lisa* and her family.

MIDDLE: *The Mona Lisa: 1. The Prince of Taranto*, published in 1956 – the first three volumes of 21.

ABOVE: Assorted Fortean Society paperwork.

on a crusade for the religion of self-respect.

As a parting shot, let's return to 1931, when the Fortean Society was a new and glorious cause, and Thayer was in full cry. Here's what he has to say – in his introduction to *Lo!* – to those stunted souls who don't appreciate Fort:

"Well, run along. Read something else. Charles Fort is heady stuff, too strong for most stomachs, too bitter for orthodox palates. Look with horror in your mirror at the eyes without curiosity, at the lips which never question. Read two hundred words in this book and return to your unquestioning, incurious, smug and complacent shell if you can. If you can, for the sake of decency, go die." That's Tiffany Thayer: no longer alive – but still kicking. **FT**

NOTES

- 1 *New York Times*, 8 May 1909.
 - 2 *New York Times*, 8 Feb 1920; *Nation*, 10 April 1920.
 - 3 Reprinted in the *Fortean Society Magazine* #3.
 - 4 Reprinted in the *Fortean Society Magazine* #2.
 - 5 *Boston Transcript*, 26 Dec 1923; *New York Times*, 25 Nov 1923.
 - 6 *Thirteen Men*, p. 313.
 - 7 *Books*, 15 Feb 1931; *New York Times*, 1 Mar 1931.
 - 8 *Doubt* #14.
 - 9 *The Books of Charles Fort*, p. xxiv.
 - 10 *Outlook*, 25 June 1930; *Boston Transcript*, 2 April 1932; *Saturday Review of Literature*, 2 Jan 1932.
 - 11 *The New Yorker*, 18 Mar 1933; reprinted in *The Portable Dorothy Parker*.
 - 12 *Doubt* #48.
 - 13 *Fortean Society Magazine* #1.
 - 14 *Doubt* #13.
 - 15 *New York Times*, 10 June 1956.
 - 16 *Time*, 11 June 1956.
 - 17 *Saturday Review of Literature*, 9 June 1956.
- See also **FT41:48-51**.

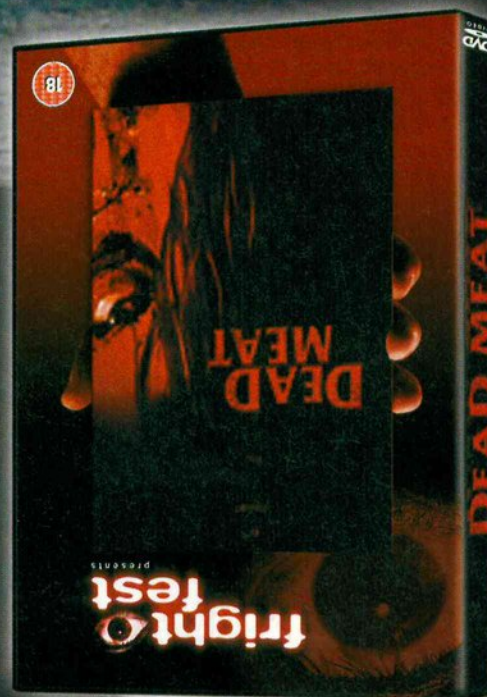
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DOUG SKINNER has appeared in *FT*, *Fate*, *The Anomalist*, *Weirdo*, *INFO Journal*, *Strange Attractor*, and elsewhere; he has lectured at UnCon and the INFO FortFest. His translation of alchemical classic *Three Dreams* is available from Opus Magnum Hermetic Sourceworks. He has written music for dance and theater, most recently for Bill Irwin's *The Harlequin Studies* and *The Regard Evening* in Manhattan.

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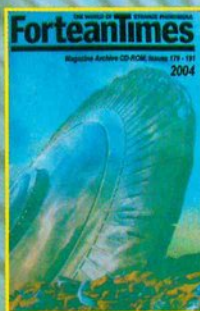
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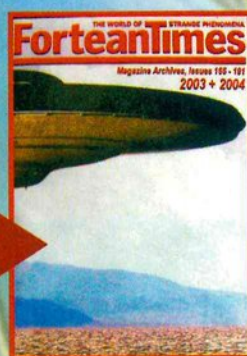
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civilic life, it seemed to the founders an ideal focus for a festival which, as well as reintegrating old folk traditions, could promote Banbury and bring together its inhabitants. This side of the plan has worked rather well. The weekend-long festival culminates at People's Park on Town Mayor's Sunday (the first Sunday in July), and the majority of those involved are local: kids dressed as knights, seahorses or jockeys, patchwork elephants created by a multicultural community group, CCF (Combined Cadet Force) members helping organise events and, leading the procession, Banbury's misleadedly-titled tourney horse in drag, the Fine Lady.

Ye Olde Englede, however, is less well represented. The procession marches to the rousing drumbeat of the RAF cadets; the music at the park is more 70s than 17th-century; and the Morris dancers who did turn up disappear before they're due to perform. The fancy dress competition is hotly contested, and deservedly won by a sparkly, sequined purple unicorn, but had there been a prize for historical accuracy it might have been harder to find a run of bad luck with the organising, the festival is rather lighter on hankies and bells and old-fashioned horses than in previous years.

So, in fact, Banbury's Hobby Horse festival can be more properly described as part of another tradition, that of the not-quite-reliable revivalists. This tradition has firm roots in the work of Victorian folklorists – the James Frazers and Cecil Sharp – and their attempts to document the 'pagan fertility rituals' of England's pre-industrial, even pre-Christian past, and the folk revival of the 1960s and 70s. So the Banbury Hobby Horse is in good company with recent revivals like the Whittelesa Straw Bear, dating from 1980, Marsden Cuckoo Day, made up by the National Trust around 10 years ago as a way of generating cash. Like Wicca and Druidry, many of the ancient customs celebrated around Britain today are essentially modern creations.

Maybe, then, the lack of authenticity shouldn't be a surprise. The lack of the promised Hook Norton beer tent, however, is one thing, but to offer cans of John Smiths instead of real ale – 'tis a travesty of what it means to be English!

NOTES

1 Harper's New Monthly Magazine, vol. 64, no. 382, March 1882, pp590-591.

2 Richard Lewis, *The Magic of English: My Year Learning to be English*, Atlantic Books, 2005, pp119-120.

Thanks to Verna Wass and local historian Brian Little for their assistance.



Inspired by a fine lady on a white horse, JEN OGILVIE makes a journey to Banbury to find out what a cock horse might be.

Riding a cock horse

forum

Have your say

SEND FORUM SUBMISSIONS TO: THE EDITOR, FORTHEAN TIMES, DENNIS PUBLISHING, 30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD U.K. OR TO DAVID_SUTTON@DENNIS.CO.UK

It should be pointed out here that could continue hassle-free. forced out to remote villages where they Morris dances and mummery plays, were Horses, along with similar depravities like War and the ascent of the Puritans; Hobby to the 16th century. Then came the Civil tradition which can be traced back at least animals in masques and civil pagantry, a based on the venerable custom of hobby But this race is the climax of Banbury eccentric English fête, you might think. For the bouncy castle, just another jettisoned due to heat and non-suitability line, cheered on by kids in fancy dress – attached, career over the finish wooden plank with a horse's head in school uniform and astride a our guys from the local PTA, each

But the rhyme might not be referring to Hobby Horses... or dragons or giants. A cockhorse is a type of Hobby Horse (of the head-on-a-stick variety, as opposed to the frame-round-waist tourney horse or the person-hidden-under-cloth mast horse). Other definitions including a tall horse, two people on a horse, an additional horse attached to pull

a coach up a hill and, as an adjective, a horse of proud, imperious attitude. One learned gentleman argued in an 1882 article, with reference to a fragment of Etruscan pottery and Aristophanes's *The Frogs*, that a cock-horse was a naval symbol, painted on ships, a chimera that was, literally, half cock, half horse. In fact, no one really knows where the rhyme comes from or what it's about. Verna's preferred explanation – as she freely admits, completely speculative – is that it was an early example of a marketing jingle. One version of the ditty starts: "Ride a cockhorse to Banbury Cross to see what Johnny might buy. This would lists all the things he might buy. This would conveniently allow for a Hobby Horse-type cockhorse, upon which you could trot around Banbury enjoying a jolly day's shopping – although it would perhaps not be the most practical form of travel. Verna's reading demonstrates her enthusiasm for the civic function of the Hobby Horse. Given its role in pre-Puritan

JEN OGILVIE is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Erotic Review*, *Time Out*, *Arena* and *The Independent* On Sunday. She has rings on her fingers and bells on her toes.



Writing to the papers

When an *FT* reader found a letter from one 'Charles Fort' in an old newspaper at a local boot sale, and posted it on the message board of forteantimes.com, much discussion ensued. How could we be sure this was 'our' Charles Fort? **ANDREW HOPCROFT** offers some thoughts on the matter.



ANDREW HOPCROFT is a member of the Fortean Times Message Board. www.forteantimes.com

TP's and Cassell's Weekly was founded in 1902 by TP O'Connor, the Irish Nationalist Member of Parliament for Galway, and a journalist of long standing (he had also founded the radical newspapers *The Star* and *The Sun*). Each week, TP's would offer a prize of one guinea for the best letter sent in by a reader. In the 6 June 1925 edition, the prize-winning letter was entitled "Explorers from other Worlds?" and was written by a Charles Fort of London. The brief letter sets out a theory that the Earth is visited from time to time by explorers from other worlds and gives two examples of anomalous objects seen in the sky: the first, a fleet of lights witnessed at sea between Japan and Shanghai, and the second a "torpedo-shaped body" seen over Burlington, Vermont.

Fortean being forteans, our message board was soon filled with questions about the letter – particularly whether or not it had been written by 'our' Charles Fort. After all, neither 'Charles' nor 'Fort' is a particularly uncommon name; a brief look through my local telephone directory yielded three Forts at three different addresses – although all sharing the initial 'R', which seemed a fortan event in its own right.

Nevertheless, we know that 'our' Fort was indeed living in London during 1925, in a flat above a grocers at 39 Marchmont Street, and pulling together much of the data for what would become *Lo!* His routine at the time was to spend half the day working at home on his notes and the other half deep in a pile of books, periodicals and newspapers at the British Museum Library. Four or five evenings a week, he and his wife, Anna, would visit the cinema (Fort having an especial liking for Lillian Gish and the adventure films of Jack Hol). On other

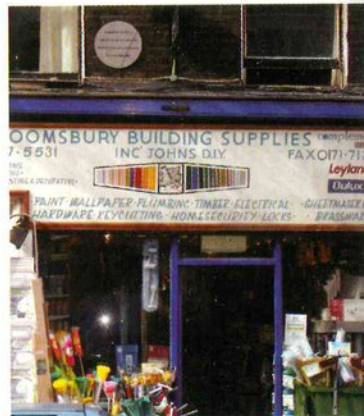
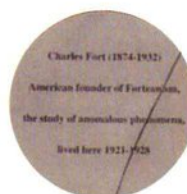
Fort's letter theorised on visitors from other worlds



evenings, Fort would go to Hyde Park where he had found "a congenial group of loungers to argue with."

The TP's Weekly letter is signed simply 'Charles Fort', as was Fort's usual practice (see FT175:56). It must be admitted that in correspondence to Theodore Dreiser (FT41:48-51; 51:40-48) he would sign letters as 'C Fort', 'CF', 'F',

RIGHT: 39 Marchmont Street, London, as it looked earlier in 2005. Charles and Anna Fort lived there from 1921 to 1928, at the very time the TP's Weekly letter was written. Note the circular grey plaque – this was placed on 16 June 1997 by Fortean Times founder Bob Rickard and fellow forteans. See FT101:4.



'Fort', and, at least once, 'Saint Charles'! But, on the whole, these are informal communications; Fort appears never to have used 'Hoy', his middle name and his mother's maiden name.

The two examples of aerial phenomena given in the letter both appear in Fort's *The Book of the Damned*, where the cases are dealt with in greater detail; sadly, the letter offers no new information or further insights. The original source material from *Nature* and the *Monthly Weather Review* has been traced and verified by Mr X in his online edition of *The Book of the Damned*:

"*Nature*, May 25, 1893:

"A letter from Capt. Charles J Norcock, of the *HMS Caroline*:

"That, upon the 24th of February, 1893, at 10pm, between Shanghai and Japan, the officer of the watch had reported 'some unusual lights'.

"They were between the ship and mountain. The mountain was about 6,000 feet [1,800m] high. The lights seemed to be globular. They moved sometimes massed, but sometimes strung out in an irregular line. They bore 'north' (magnetic) until lost to sight. Duration two hours.

"The next night the lights were seen again.

"They were, for a time, eclipsed by a small island. They bore north at about the same speed and in about the same direction as the speed and direction of the *Caroline*. But they were lights that cast a reflection: there was a glare upon the horizon under them. A telescope brought out but few details: that they were reddish, and seemed to emit a faint smoke. This time the duration was seven-and-a-half hours.

"Then Capt. Norcock says that, in the same general locality, and at about the same time, Capt. Castle, of *HMS Leander*, had seen lights. He had altered his course and had made towards them. The lights

ABOVE: Charles Fort at the home of novelist and friend Theodore Dreiser, 4 October 1931.

A ONE GUINEA PRIZEWINNING LETTER BY CHARLES FORT

EXPLORERS FROM OTHER WORLDS?
Sir, - There are recorded indications that this earth has, from time to time, been visited by explorers from other worlds. In *Nature* (May 25, 1903) is published an account, by Captain Charles J Norcock, of HMS *Caroline*, of a fleet of lights in the sky, which he saw, upon the night of February 24, 1903, between Shanghai and Japan. Three luminous objects, if not lights upon several vessels from some other world, moved, sometimes in a massed formation,

and sometimes in an irregular line. Anything of a meteoric nature is excluded, because the duration was two hours. The next night these appearances were observed again, moving as if exploring, for seven hours and a half hours. Upon July 2, 1907, according to an account by Bishop John S Michaud, published in the *Monthly Weather Review* (Washington), 1907, page 310, a "torpedo-shaped body" appeared in the sky, over the city of Burlington, Vermont. For a while it was stationary, and then it slowly moved away. "Tongues of fire" issued from the object. There was a terrific explosion at the time, an attempt was made to explain the conditions were stormy at the time, an attempt was made to explain the explosion and some-thing that was seen to fall in terms of "ball-lightning", but the account is of a vessel which appeared, seemed to fire a projectile, and sailed away. There was no known airship of this earth that could have appeared in Vermont in July, 1907, - Charles Fort (London) *TP's Weekly*, 6 June 1925.

[1.8m] long by 8 inches [20cm] in diameter, the shell or cover having a dark appearance, with here and there tongues of fire issuing from spots on the surface, resembling red-hot, unburnished copper. Although stationary when first noticed, this object soon began to move, rather slowly, and disappeared over Dolan brothers' store, southward. As it moved, the covering seemed rupturing in places, and through these the intensely red flames issued.

"Bishop Michaud attempts to correlate it with meteorological observations." (*The Book of the Damned*, JBP 1995, pp 278-279. The original source, as Mr X points out, is: William H. Alexander, "A possible case of ball lightning", *Monthly Weather Review*, 35 (July 1907): 310-311.) We know that at this time Fort was carrying out correspondence (see FT175:56 for his April 1925 letter to HJ Barrett). A year later he would write letters to the *Toronto Daily Star* investigating fall of fish. Also, we can assume that Fort knew of *TP's Weekly* at this time; it is listed once as a source in of 11 September 1926 for the spontaneous image on the walls of Christchurch, Oxford, of the likeness of the late Dean Liddell, who died in 1898 (*Wild Talents*, JBP 1998, p109).

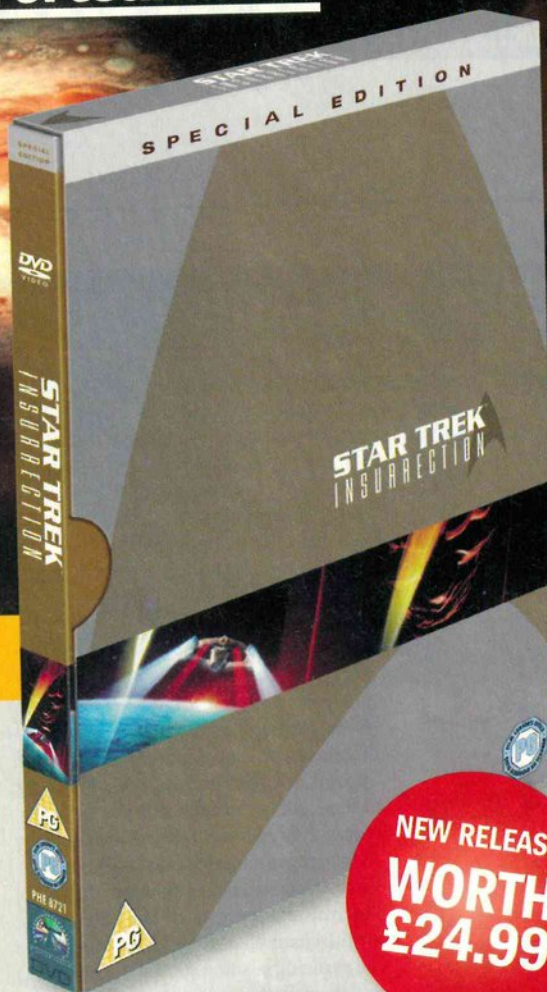
We can conclude, then (with as much certainty as is appropriate for fortians), that the *TP's Weekly* letter is by "our" Charles Fort. However, the greater question remains: what are we to do with such examples of fortiana as this letter? The answer, I think, is to disseminate and scatter them about as widely as possible. Keep them out of the hands of people who claim ownership and expertise, make notes upon them, draw your own conclusions, publish where possible on the net, or in magazines - and don't allow such treasures to languish in the abode of the damned. **F**



Letters should not, as a rule, exceed 2" "TP's and Cassell's Weekly."
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Explorers from other Worlds?
Sir, - There are recorded indications that this earth has, from time to time, been visited by explorers from other worlds. In *Nature* (May 25, 1903) is published an account, by Captain Charles J. Norcock, of H.M.S. *Caroline*, of a fleet of lights in the sky, which he saw, upon the night of February 24, 1893, between Shanghai and Japan. These luminous objects, if not lights upon several vessels from some other world, moved, sometimes in a massed formation, and sometimes in an irregular line. Anything of a meteoric nature is excluded, because the duration was two hours. The next night these appearances were observed again, moving as if exploring, for seven hours and a half. Upon July 2, 1907, according to an account by Bishop John S. Michaud, published in the *Monthly Weather Review* (Washington), 1907, page 310, a "torpedo-shaped body" appeared in the sky, over the city of Burlington, Vermont. For a while it was stationary, and then it slowly moved away. "Tongues of fire" issued from the object. There was a terrific explosion. Because conditions were stormy at the time, an attempt was made to explain the explosion and something that was seen to fall in terms of "ball-lightning," but the account is of a vessel which appeared, seemed to fire a projectile, and sailed away. There was no known airship of this earth that could have appeared in Vermont in July, 1907. - CHARLES FORT (London)

had fled from him. At least, they had moved higher in the sky." (*The Book of the Damned*, JBP 1995, p283. In the notes to his online edition, Mr X adds: Chas. J. Norcock, "An atmospheric phenomenon in the North China Sea", *Nature*, 48 (May 25, 1893): 76-7. The observation was made on February 24, 1893, at 32°58' N., 126°33' E., south of Cheju Do (Quelpart Island; Auckland).)
"That, July 2, 1907, in the town of Burlington, Vermont, a terrific explosion had been heard throughout the city. A ball of light, or a luminous object, had been seen to fall from the sky - or from a torpedo-shaped thing, or construction, in the sky. No one had seen this thing that had exploded fall from a larger body that was in the sky - but if we accept that at the same time there was a larger body in the sky - is that a "My own acceptance is that a dirtiable in the sky, or a construction that showed every sign of disrupting, had barely time to drop - whatever it did drop - and to speed away to safety above."
"The following story is told, in the *Review*, by Bishop John S. Michaud: "I was standing on the corner of Church and College Streets, just in front of the Howard bank, and facing east, engaged in conversation with Ex-Governor Woodbury and Mr A.A. Buell, when, without the slightest indication, or warning, we were startled by what sounded like a most unusual and terrific explosion, evidently very near by. Raising my eyes, and looking eastward along College Street, I observed a torpedo-shaped body, some 300 feet [90m] away, stationary in appearance, and suspended in the air, about 50 feet [15m] above the tops of buildings. In size it was about 6 feet



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reviews

World War I's Whitehall farce

Who better to defend the United Kingdom's imperial interests in Central Africa than an incompetent, cross-dressing pen-pusher and his two tiny wooden boats?



Mimi and Tou Tou go forth

The bizarre battle of Lake Tanganyika

Giles Foden

Penguin
Pb, 366pp, illus, hb, £7.99, ISBN 0141009845

FORTLEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.99

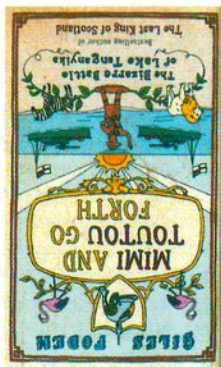
the cruiser *Königsberg*, using it for supplies and for ferrying his men.

The Belgians already had extensive interests in the region, and von Lettow harried them mercilessly. It was important that his activities be stopped, but rather than send an experienced officer, in 1915 the Commander Geoffrey Spicer

Simpson, who at the time was relegated to a small office in a forgotten part of Whitehall. While he had experience working in Africa and China, Spicer was a bizarre choice. He epitomised the worst aspects of the English middle class: he was snobbish, arrogant, loud, a congenital liar, braggart and a prig, with an annoying, nasal voice. He told tales so fantastic that even his friends found it hard not to laugh. Worse, his naval record was abysmal: he'd been court-martialled twice, he'd sunk a ship, needlessly damaged a submarine and run another ship aground. Somehow he persuaded the authorities to let him lead an expedition to Tanganyika to sink

both the *Königsberg* and the *Hedwig von Wissmann* and establish British sovereignty. There is a hint that his fellow officers may have connived at this – he was universally hated – but it's also true that in 1915 there was nobody else of any note available. Yet this adventurer had guts, and his muscular frame was usually at the forefront of any action. Despite his unsuitability for the task, his utter incompetence and lack of military training, he had great determination and in his resplendent uniform he made an imposing figure. The effect, however, was spoiled by the fact that while in Africa he habitually wore a woman's skirt. "I design them myself, and my wife makes 'em up", he told astonished onlookers; even in battle, German gunners were nonplussed. His brief was to sink the German boats, and to do this Spicer was given

"He'd been court-martialled, had sunk a ship, damaged a sub and run another ship aground."



two wooden craft, little more than armed motorboats, which he had to transport to Africa.

This amazing trek is a fabulous read in its own right, but Spicer got to the lake and in two strange battles managed to sink the pride of the German's African fleet. Not that Spicer had much to do with it – his staff remained bemused by his signals (in the first battle he used 'semaphore' but his gunner thought he was having fits; in the second battle, he refused to remove his cigarette holder from between his teeth so anything he said was totally incomprehensible). What tilted the balance were several huge slices of luck and sheer foolhardiness, though the Germans contributed with an uncharacteristic lack of preparation, followed by an inexplicable lapse in ruthlessness.

To cap it all, one German ship was accidentally rammed it, damaging his own vessel at the same time. Spicer's absurd little flotilla was ill-equipped, mismatched and barely seaworthy. Perhaps the Germans suffered from overconfidence; coupled with the effect of first seeing Spicer through their binoculars, it might have led them to underestimate the ramshackle British force that was doggedly pursuing them around the lake. Whatever the reasons, Spicer won it decisively. The result was that local tribesmen came to regard him as a demi-god, and Spicer hammed it up outrageously. In contrast, a German Captain was so mortified to have been beaten by such a clown that he contemplated suicide.

Spicer's downfall came when he was told to link up with the military professionals sent in to finish the job. Asked to co-operate with Belgian land forces, his nincompoop behaviour and total lack of understanding of the issues at stake managed only to enrage them. Later he was seconded to a British military detachment, and having made a mess of that too, their contempt for him became so marked that he was delighted when he was invalided home with mental exhaustion. Although a lot of strange things took place, you could argue that this isn't strictly a Fortean book, but it's wonderful nevertheless. Were it fiction, I'd score it 9/10, but it's not. Every word is true, carefully researched and beautifully written. To make a point, I was going to give it 11/10, but on reflection I insist on giving it 20. It's twice as good as anything you'll read this year. Spicer would have liked that.

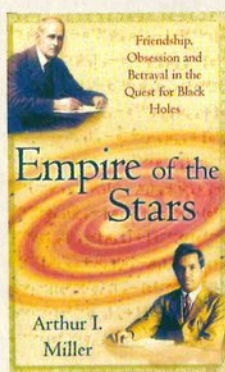
Jack Romano

Fortean Times Verdict
DESERVES CUIT STATUS. BUY YOUR FIRST EDITION NOW!

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP INFORMATION SEE PAGE 63

The star of India

The Grand Old Man and the Young Turk's feud stymied astrophysics for four decades



Empire of the Stars

Friendship, Obsessions and Betrayal in the Quest for Black Holes

Arthur I Miller

Little, Brown

Hb, 400pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £17.99, ISBN 0316725552

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99

This is an excellent account of what happens when a new idea runs up against established wisdom. The idea came from Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, known as Chandra, a promising young physicist who came to Cambridge in 1930. His idea was that a dying star, if massive enough, would not just shrink to an inert white dwarf, but could collapse to virtually nothing – an ultra-dense body from which not even light could escape or, as it was later dubbed, a black hole. The conventional wisdom was embodied by Britain's foremost astrophysicist, Arthur Eddington, who refused to countenance such a ridiculous concept; not least because it would condemn his own theory which, he believed, could unite the emerging fields of relativity and quantum physics.

The clash boiled over at a 1935 meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society. Chandra presented his latest work, which he believed solved a problem first highlighted in Eddington's own research on white dwarfs. Eddington, in return, publicly humiliated the young Indian, ignoring the scientific

argument in favour of withering rhetoric. The audience, even those who generally supported Chandra, fell in line behind the elder statesman of the science.

The refusal to accept Chandra's conclusions hindered astrophysics for four decades, Miller argues. The first half of his book examines the relationship between the two men, during one of the most exciting periods in physics as the insights offered by relativity and quantum theory were applied to the Universe at large. Eddington emerges as brilliant but flawed, with a history of demolishing people he disagreed with. Miller suggests Eddington's repressed homosexuality might have been a factor in this; there might also have been an element of racism. Intriguingly, Eddington also developed a fascination with the number 137, which he believed had Kabbalistic as well as physical significance. For his part, Chandra took a long time to settle into life in the West and had a troubled relationship with his family in India; he was not innocent of aggression when his ideas were challenged.

The second half places the feud into the wider context of 20th-century astronomical and nuclear physics – many of the key players found themselves working on the atomic bomb research during WWII. Chandra's controversial ideas were gradually vindicated by observation and became accepted wisdom. Chandra was rewarded with a Nobel prize in 1983 and, four years after his death in 1995, gave his name to the orbiting Chandra X-ray Observatory.

This is an engrossing and enlightening read, and not just for physicists.

Tim Chapman

Fortean Times Verdict

ASTROPHYSICAL HISTORY FOR A GENERAL AUDIENCE

9

Freemasons

A History and Exploration of the World's Oldest Secret Society

H Paul Jeffers

Citadel Press (www.kensingtonbooks.com)

Pb, 256pp, ind, appxs, £9.99, ISBN 0806526629

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99

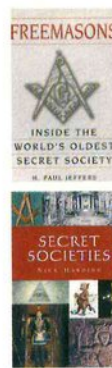
Secret Societies

Nick Harding

Pocket Essentials (www.pocketessentials.com)

Hb, 160pp, bib, web resources, £9.99, ISBN 1904048412

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99



I suppose we have Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* to blame for the new flutter of interest in secret societies. Having previously worked on biographies and in journalism, Jeffers admits he came to the subject fresh; his book, then, is more about discovery than experience. The first chapters provide a very competent, if brief, history of the origins of Masonry; or rather, of what is generally believed about its history. There is, after all, about 1,000 years between the building of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and the iffy story of the ritual murder of its architect Hiram Abif and the first recorded creation of a mason's guild in York in AD936 – enough time for the romance of a well-connected, secretive society to take off.

Jeffers's contribution to the subject makes the book valuable to any student of the Masons and secret societies in general, and he focuses on Freemasonry in America in some detail. Beginning with the first known Mason to settle in America (the Scotsman John Skene who became a governor of New Jersey in the late 1680s), Jeffers explores the role of prominent Masons in the founding of the Constitution, in the political and military campaigns of the Civil War and in the great industrial expansion beginning in the 19th century.

Along the way, there are essays on the Masonic attitude to female and black membership, both of which have a number of specialised lodges; on the so-called 'anti-Masons', opposition groups originating in equally secret Catholic conspiracies or in anti-Semitic nationalistic movements; the implication of

Freemasonry in the Jack the Ripper murders; and speculation about the future of Masonry and its supposed links with global governance. There are useful appendices too: Masonic songs, a list of prominent Masons and a Masonic chronology.

Harding's book could not be more different. Spending a few pages each on a selection of 39 assorted cults, clubs, societies and minor religions, this can't be more than a quick reference. It goes from the usual suspects (Freemasons, Opus Dei, Rosicrucians, Birchers etc), through borderline religious banditry (Thugees, Assassins, Triads, Mafia, KKK and Templars etc) to the inspired nutters (Gnostics, Illuminati, Golden Dawn, Hell Fire clubs and Cathars etc), and, finally, some that probably never existed, like the Priuré de Sion and the secret masters who supposedly live in the Himalayas. It should make a handy companion for those gripped by Dan Brown's oeuvre.

Otto Minyak

Fortean Times Verdict

DIFFERENT BUT EQUALLY USEFUL REFERENCE WORKS

8

Sacred Places

Prehistory and Public Imagination

Bob Trubshaw

Heart of Albion Press

Pb, 203pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.95 (£14.95, inc P&P, from www.hoap.co.uk), ISBN 1872883672

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.95



Bob Trubshaw stands at the crossroads of alternative and mainstream archaeology, folklore and popular culture, elements of which this book introduces.

The first section deals with the theory and mythology of place: the West "focuses" on the visual; but other cultures use hearing and other senses to get a sense of "place". Readers of Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* will recognise the notion of "landscape" – Britain has a long tradition of romanticising the rural.

As this book is about how the past is experienced, consumed and reproduced within our culture, Trubshaw deals comprehensively with the "alternative archaeology" scene's leys, dowsing, Earth energies,

Steam engine time expanded

When very gifted science communicators tackle the science of Pratchett's and Tolkien's fantasies, the results are... well, fantastic

While we might be more aware these days of how Tolkien used his orcs and Sauron's dark magic as metaphors for all that is bad about rampant industrialisation, especially in the service of war –

(after President Eisenhower) like to call the “military-industrial complex” – we are less aware of Tolkien's interest in contemporary science. As Gee explains in his introduction: “He prized science as the acquisition of knowledge. What he deployed was its use as an instrument of domination.” This seems like a good credo for working wizards.

Without trying to force-fit Tolkien's creations into banal explanations, Gee delves into the world. What kind of wings would a Balinog have? Is the six-limbed dragon? How could elves see great distances? How could mithril be so light yet so hard? How would orcs reproduce? Are magic and science indistinguishable? Other chapters tackle giant spiders, Ents, the science of linguistics, Tolkien's great ‘ages’ of time, and the practicality of Hobbit burrows.

It really is heartening to see such unadulterated passion for their subject as displayed here. Together, this is some of the best science writing around today, intelligent and witty, creative and playful, all without any visible concession to New Age guff and para-nonsense. Regard these books as experiments in creative thinking applied to science. Now, if only science could be taught like this in school, many of us would have paid more attention.

Bob Rickard

For the Times Verdict

ALL THE RIGHT REASONS
SCIENCE THAT'S INSPIRING FOR

8

the natural sciences and writes “The Theology of Species”, plunging Roundworld (our Earth) onto the path of complete stagnation. This won't do, so the wizards at Unseen University – who had inadvertently created Roundworld and felt responsible for rescuing its occupants from death by boredom and tradition – have to set things right. The Discworld wizards (the alter egos of our trio of authors) realise that Darwin's role is absolutely vital in inspiring society and individuals to break out of suffocating religious conservatism. From it, they argue, flows the extraordinary expansion of scientific knowledge in the 19th century that laid the foundations for truly amazing discoveries, theories and modern technology.

Time-travel quantum physics, causality, geology, history, DNA, black holes and infinity (including resolving Zeno's Paradox) are all employed in some of the wildest speculation ever seen in the name of science as the authors tackle the fundamental philosophies that make up the world as we know it. Even Fort's notion of “steam engine time” gets a chapter (although he is not credited). What's more, Stewart and Cohen's irreverent contributions are as gripping as the Pratchett novellette they festoon and almost as funny. Like Cohen and Stewart, Dr Henry Gee is a veteran science writer, as well as being a senior editor of *Nature*. He, too, uses a prime canon of high fantasy as a platform for launching off into flights of delightful ruminations that are, nevertheless, rooted in good science. Like them, too, Gee – who has written books on the human genome, “deep time” geology, and the variety of dinosaurs – reveals an impressively up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of modern fantasy and science fiction.

Darwin's Watch

The Science of Discworld 3

Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart & Jack Cohen

Ebury Press
Hb, 344pp, ind, £17.99, ISBN 0091898234

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99

The Science of Middle Earth

Henry Gee

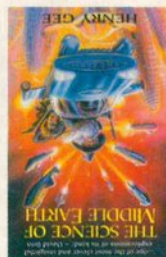
Souvenir Press, London

Pb, 253pp, notes, ind, £10.99, ISBN 0285637231

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99

Later, a new genre has developed which bridges fiction and science. We have seen “The science of...” the X Files (by Anne Simon), *Harry Potter* (by Roger Highfield), *Star Trek* (by Lawrence Krauss), and even Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (by John Gribbin), to name just a few.

Terry Pratchett teams up – for the third time – with science writers Ian Stewart (professor of maths at Warwick University) and biologist Jack Cohen to underpin the physics of his fictional Discworld universe. Discworld is supported by four elephants standing on the back of a gargantuan turtle as it flies through the celestial vastness. The scientific discussions form interludes in a hilarious story about how Charles Darwin wrote the wrong book. Deep in his theological cups, Darwin eschews



pagan beliefs and practices. Earthlights and Great Earth/Mother Goddesses. People stuck in those paradigms should read this book ASAP.

The second section deals with Wiltshire, with chapters on the iconic Stonehenge and the less iconic Avebury (is there a single image that “captures” Avebury?); south-west Wales; and south-east (or south-west) Scotland – the running heads and chapter titles disagree! Trubshaw looks at how their prehistoric monuments relate to what we describe as the “landscape” and how they have been the focus for excavations, myths, reconstructions, festivals and tourists. It's inevitable that some topics are not covered in depth, but the 16-page bibliography will set you on the right (straight?) track. Few of the alternative archaeology texts are in the British Library, let alone public or academic libraries, but Trubshaw has made many of his articles available at www.hoap.co.uk. The book is illustrated with his fine photographs. I recommend it to anyone interested in archaeology, popular culture, contemporary mythology or “alternative archaeology”.

Richard Alexander

For the Times Verdict

GET UP TO DATE WITH RECENT
ACADEMIC ARCHAEOLOGY

8

Lint

Steve Aylett

Thunder's Mouth Press

Pb, 222pp, illus, notes, bpb, ind, £9.99/\$14.95, ISBN 1560256842

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99



Aylett has written a hilarious biography of the sci-fi satirist and general-purpose oddball Jeff (or Jack) Lint, author of *One Less Bastard*. It is as Aylett says, “a story of mischief, true creativity and blank stares” involving pulp fiction, psychedelia, *Star Trek* and Hollywood. Employment, Lint concluded, was “atrophied speeded up.” There is a sting on the last page, but it would be unkind to reveal it.

For the Times Verdict

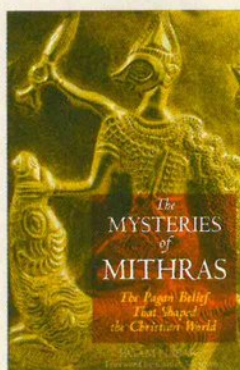
FOR AFICIONADOS OF PULP
FICTION EVERYWHERE

9

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP INFORMATION SEE PAGE 63

The cult that took the bull by the horns

Christianity and Mithraism, the soldiers' religion, had much in common, so why did one disappear? A study, written with élan but missing crucial Græco-Roman texts, fails to answer all the questions



The Mysteries of Mithras

The Pagan Belief That Shaped the Modern World

Payam Nabarz

Inner Traditions

Pb, 230pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 1594770271

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

The Persian-Sufi author Nabarz combines Oxford post-doctoral cancer research with practising dervishism, druidism, and Mithraism. The religionist here forges well ahead of the scientist. I expected the worst from a book dedicated to Ali "110", inspired by friends' "magical encouragement" and drooling foreworded by Caitlin Matthews with the preposterous claim that, pre-Nabarz, Mithras sources "were almost unobtainable" – didn't she see his bibliography? Chapter 8, a DIY guide for intending initiates, offers such minute prescriptions as: Avoid the Sufi 'zeker' technique if you have neck injuries. Its exhortations to sexual abstinence will turn off most British wannabe Mithraists.

Nabarz rightly acknowledges that the Persian-Indian connection with the Roman version of Mithraism is now contested (Franz Cumont being no longer the last word), but wrongly declines to join this debate. There is a cornucopia of translated

Mithraic texts, some (e.g. "Next 'hiss' forth long: Sss! Sss!") reminding me of the spoofs in Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest's *The Egyptologists*, interspersed with Nabarz's own verses. Also, an intriguing modern Mithraic miscellany, from Garfield's – the President, not the cat – cultic connections to the heavy metal band Mithras.

Outside the unavoidable heavy-going of religious technicalities, Nabarz writes with panache, and I cannot dislike a man who ends with "one has to be able to laugh at oneself", knocking out a beta-plus parody of Kipling's 'A Song to Mithras'. Nabarz is less at home with the Græco-Roman sources, his sparse citations largely second-hand from Manfred Clauss's *Roman Cult of Mithras* (Edinburgh, 2000). It is not quite the "mystery" he makes it out to be. Along with the many epigraphical and papyrus texts, a host of Greek (Strabo, Xenophon), Roman (Athenæus, Curtius Rufus, Claudian, Martianus Capella), and Byzantine (Nonnus, Psellus, the Suda dictionary-encyclopædia) authors are overlooked, thereby missing many informational nuggets, e.g. people were already swearing 'By Mithras' in the fifth-century BC, while the Persian king was allowed to get drunk one day a year, to honour Mithras.

Nabarz neglects the Ur-text, Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, crediting first-century BC Cilician pirates with importing "certain secret rites of Mithras which continue to the present time." Plutarch (c.AD46–120) apparently feels his readers need this explanation. Yet, in AD66, the Parthian King Tiridates assured Nero at a public gala: "I love you as I do Mithras." (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*). A generation after Plutarch, the Syrian-born satirist Lucian is joking about this god in a way that implies audience familiarity.

Another key text overlooked is the statement in the anonymous *Augustan History*'s biography of Commodus, where that batty emperor "desecrated the rites of Mithras with actual murder, although they merely simulate terror-producing acts." Hardly Cumont's "immense stir", though after Commodus Mithraism is conventionally held to have dominated the religious scene, especially among the Roman legions, until its final suppression (Jerome and other sources describe late fourth-century Mithraeum destructions) by Christianity, with which it shared some common details. (Their gods were both virgin-born on 25 December – Nabarz tabulates the salencies.) As Renan said, "If Christianity had been checked in its growth by some deadly disease, the world would have become Mithraic."

Nabarz (not uniquely) burkes the issue of how the cult of the "pale Galilæan" overcame that of the military. Perhaps because those scholars (e.g. A Bivar, R MacMullen, GR Watson – all unmentioned) who downplay this god's actual appeal to Roman squaddies are on to something. After all, there are as many Mithraea in civilian sites as military ones. The fact that nine out of 10 Mithraic dedications on Hadrian's Wall are from officers, a pattern repeated elsewhere, suggests the attraction was more to top brass than rank-and-filers. Was ritual tauroctony really that much of a come-on? Nabarz seeks a connection between the enticement of Mithraic celibacy and the ban on marriage for Roman soldiers. But legionaries were allowed, indeed encouraged, to have regular girlfriends or common-law wives, and Septimius Severus lifted the nuptial ban at the very moment that Mithraism began its zoom up the religious Top

Ten. Nor is it clear why sex-starved squaddies would be drawn to a cult that excluded women, albeit there is ancient evidence of localised exceptions to this rule, perhaps underlining the point.

Nabarz sticks to the traditional seven stages of initiation, whereas the ancient evidence, mainly inscriptional, attests to both more and less. Dependence on second-hand source anthologies engenders confusion between book and age numbers for Julian, while Bianchi's tendentiously translated Latin is reproduced without comment.

Footnotes are desultory; can every reader be trusted to (e.g.) recognise the utterly obscure Roman poetaster Proficentius? The bibliography registers some 30 books, though only one of Cumont's (inaccurately, at that), while the huge mass of archaeological, epigraphical, and Christian-Mithra journal literature is ignored, as is the surely fundamental two-volumed *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies* (ed. JR Hinnells, Manchester, 1975), containing the master's final confession of "our well-nigh total ignorance of the mysteries." Does Nabarz pass over this out of discomfort? Indeed, when you add this to the physical smallness of Mithraea (none hold more than 40), it might be concluded that Mithraism was in fact not all that important.

Nabarz saves Googlers time by his rich provision of electronic references. My time, by contrast, was not saved by a review-copy that has four blank pages where the index was supposed to be.

Fortean Times Verdict: a gentleman's 'C'.

Barry Baldwin

Fortean Times Verdict

WRITTEN WITH PANACHE, BUT NOT WITHOUT FAULTS

6

Not from round these parts...

A treat for all you bigfoot fans: not only is the book clear, forward-looking and intriguing, it's also – gasp! – designed to be read by humans

In detail by Powell, one of the most baffling bigfoot characteristics reported by eye witnesses is its apparent ability to vanish into thin air – one second it is there, the next it is gone. Here, I feel, Powell's eagerness to be seen to give all possible solutions, however remote, a fair hearing goes a little too far – especially when he soberly considers the prospect of bigfoot having evolved the extraordinary ability to warp local time, perhaps even to move between dimensions, or at least to use its own mental processes to immobilise temporarily local time. All large, forest-inhabiting animals are masters of camouflage and the ability to disappear from sight without needing to resort to such extreme measures, so why should bigfoot need to be made a special case? Such disagreements aside, however, *The Locals* is an excellent book for the modern-day bigfoot reader. True, it is nothing if not bold for a bigfoot author to all but ignore the Patterson-Gimlin film – rather like writing a book on the Loch Ness monster and not mentioning Jim Dinsdale's film. Nevertheless, Powell's brave gamble pays off, enabling him to haul his hefty subject into the present in terms of data proffered and of the ways in which such data need to be examined, and I can certainly recommend his book to anyone seeking a clear, forward-thinking approach to this ever-intriguing subject.

Karl Shuker

Fortean Times Verdict

8

DRAGS BIGFOOT INTO THE 21ST CENTURY – A WELCOME BOOK

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP

To order any of these titles – or any other book in print – contact the
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Researchers Organisation, for whom he was once a curator. Much of the data presented here will be fresh to readers, but there is also coverage of modern cases, most notably the Skookum body cast, which receives an entire chapter: too many bigfoot tomes have unbroken, closely-spaced text. Powell, with wide margins, sub-headings and clear paragraphs, actively encourages reading. Powell's accessible, conversational style avoids the literary Scylla and Charybdis of dry and sensationalised commentaries that are so often found in books on this subject. Perhaps this should come as no surprise; Powell is a science teacher and is used to presenting data in an easily-digestible manner. For the same reason, we should expect to find emphasis upon the science behind bigfoot

investigation, and this too is amply represented here. An entire chapter is devoted to bigfoot science at the book's beginning, including some very interesting information on hair analyses and DNA, and at its end there are rigorous examinations of the three major explanations currently on offer for bigfoot – as an elusive but real creature, as a paranormal entity, and as an extraterrestrial being. There is also a fascinating Appendix entitled 'Using the Bigfoot Phenomenon to Teach the Scientific Method: A Set of Science Lessons for Students in Grades 8–12', which should guarantee attention from even the most jaded student!

All through his book, Powell uses the data gathered to help establish a profile of behaviour exhibited by bigfoot, and mostly this works well, with one exception. As documented

The Locals
A contemporary investigation into the Bigfoot/Sasquatch phenomenon
Thom Powell
Hancock House
Pb, 271 pp, ind, \$19.95/£17.50, ISBN 08883935523
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.50



Looking across some shelves filled with dozens of books about bigfoot and other man-beasts, I wonder how many more can this subject sustain, and how anyone can hope to find a different approach or slant. I am happy to say from reading this book that its author, Thom Powell, has successfully confronted the second one. The first welcome change, highlighted in the subtitle, is that he has concentrated upon contemporary cases instead of recycling the hoary old standards. So if you're looking for yet another re-examination of the Patterson-Gimlin footage, for example, you won't find it here. Indeed, perusing the index, all-too-often absent from bigfoot books, I discover only one reference to it (and it is, sadly, incorrect; it appears on p45 of the book rather than p25). Nor are there photos of casts, bigfoot statues, eyewitnesses – just a map and some simple line drawings. Instead, Powell has turned to his own Oregon-based investigations and to the files of the Bigfoot Field

Uncle Jack
The True Identity of Jack the Ripper
Tony Williams with Humphrey Price
Oxon Books
Hb, 227pp, illus, ind, £16.99, ISBN 075267083
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

Up until the centenary of these crimes (1988) most books on JTR were formulaic: they gave a half-baked version of the murders, tilting towards a new "suspect", with the books festooned with claims such as "Britain's most notorious murderer revealed at last" or "it can only be described as, at long last, the truth". Both examples of blurb being taken from the publication under review. History has largely replaced such partisanship with magisterial works such as Evans and Skinner's *The Ultimate JTR Sourcebook: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Robinson 2000). Against this background, it takes publishing courage to bring out yet another formulaic book, but *Uncle Jack* remains precisely that. Almost a decade ago, the TV station S4C approached me with the claim that a mad Welsh doctor from Anglesey was the true "Jackra". Almost certainly he wasn't.

The "unofficial suspect" in this book is a Welsh gynaecologist, Sir John Williams, who died in May 1926, an impossibility late after a series of frenzied serial killings in 1888, a full 38 years earlier. Why did he need to "rip" the wombs from two Whitechapel prostitutes, when various Royal Colleges could supply him with an abundance of properly prepared specimens? It all comes down to the Diary of Sir John Williams for 1888: "Most of the pages are missing; those that remain are blank... I (the author) felt this is a horrible near-travesty of the breathless hype surrounding the now discredited Maybrick/JTR "Diary". The current authors should be warned of the Curse attached to that "Diary". It has involved serious financial losses and premature death. Do not presume to mess with a "JTR Diary"!

Fortean Times Verdict

6

YUP, ANOTHER RIPPER SUSPECT FOR THE READING PUBLIC

Nick Warren

TO THE OUTER LIMITS... DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ADJUST THE PICTURE



The Outer Limits: The Original Series Vol 1 + Vol 2
MGM Home Entertainment £39.99 + £24.99

The release of this TV classic in its entirety – spread over two DVD sets – results in a doorstop-sized collection (12 discs and 49 episodes in all) providing enough viewing to keep even an insomniac fortan entertained for some time.

While *The Outer Limits* clearly took its inspiration from Rod Serling's longer-running (and more critically acclaimed) *The Twilight Zone*, it evolved its own identity by combining reasonably intelligent stories with a genuinely inventive parade of scary monsters. It abandoned much of *Zone*'s high-concept strangeness for a more down-to-Earth approach, based on a thorough plundering of pulp SF mags and film noir aesthetics; as a result SF purists have tended to turn up their noses at *The Outer Limits*, but it remains a classic of the genre. It never achieved *The Twilight Zone*'s longevity, running for just two seasons from 1963-65, and its main failing was that – like later series of *Zone* – it chose a one-hour format over a more suitable 30 minutes. As a result, what should have been tight, punchy stories often become seriously overextended, outstaying their welcomes with clunky exposition and meaningless action sequences.

Having said that, the show was never less than watchable, and remains fascinating as an index of the fears and fantasies of Cold War-era

America. Some episodes rise well above the average: Harlan Ellison's 'Demon With a Glass Hand' is a tragic tale of time travel – a darker cousin of the same writer's script for *Star Trek*'s 'City on the Edge of Forever'. 'The Architects of Fear' remains a genuinely chilling tale in which politicians and scientists decide to create a fake extraterrestrial threat intended to prevent mankind destroying itself in war – the fact that this involves one of their number giving up his own humanity and undergoing a gruesome surgical transformation into an alien life-form is still a truly disturbing idea, and the whole tale has a kind of grim contemporary resonance.

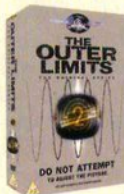
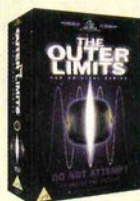
My personal favourite, though, remains 'The Galaxy Being', in which a radio station owner makes contact with an extraterrestrial intelligence via the airwaves... but has to tear himself away to attend a dull social function with his suburban wife!

And then there are the chances to spot actors 'before they were famous' – William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, Robert Duvall, David

McCallum, Martin Landau and Martin Sheen, among others.

One big drawback, though, is the complete lack of extras; anyone discovering the series for the first time would be grateful for some guidance, while even old-timers like me would have enjoyed some context-setting features and interviews. **7/10**

R C Samson



Monster Man

Dir Michael David, US 2003
Tartan DVD £15.99

Two college buddies are driving down a deserted rural highway when their inane conversation is interrupted by a terrifying monster truck hell-bent on running them off the road... Sound familiar? Yes, this could be *Jeepers Creepers* all over again. Mercifully, it isn't. *Monster Man* is, rather, an unashamedly dumbass take on the 'scary rednecks' sub-genre established by *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance*, with a knowing nod to Spielberg's *Duel* thrown in for good measure. This is definitely a horror comic for the *Jackass* generation, but writer/director Michael David has sufficient understanding of how horror and comedy relate to one another to balance the toilet humour with genuine scares and grossness and make it all work.

David Sutton

Fortan Times Verdict

PARK YOUR BRAIN AND ENJOY
THE MONSTER TRUCK RIDE

7

Uncovered: The War on Iraq

Dir Robert Greenwald, US 2005
Blue Dolphin £16.99

There are probably few *FT* readers who haven't noticed that the various rationales for the invasion of Iraq by America and its loyal little chum, Great Britain, have been shown to be specious. The Republican government simply decided to attack Iraq, and the creation of rationales was left to the intelligence services – which, since 1945, have produced them for all manner of similar ventures.

This time it was different. There was considerable opposition to the invasion *within* the US intelligence and foreign services. This DVD puts that opposition's case. By mixing interviews with a large cast of former CIA, State Department and Pentagon officials, some very senior, with footage of Bush, Rice, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz issuing statements, the film shows that the Bush administration's 'intelligence' on Iraq was exaggerated or faked.

As an opponent of the war, I'm probably biased, but this is a terribly impressive piece of work:

think Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* with more information and less bombast and schmalz. Even if you know the material, it's fascinating to hear this array of opposition voices – and these aren't just the usual suspects: Milt Bearden is the CIA officer who ran the US's war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and John Dean was Nixon's lawyer during the Watergate era. Highly recommended.

Robin Ramsay

Fortan Times Verdict

IMPRESSIVE DOCUMENTARY
ABOUT A VERY REAL CONSPIRACY

8

Little Lady Fauntleroy

Dir Ned Parker, GB 2004

Fabulous Fims/Fremantle Home Entertainment £14.99

It's got to be an easy target for a documentary maker: a kid (James Harries) who shot to fame as an antiques expert on Terry Wogan's TV show is now an attention-seeking transsexual. And the obnoxious, bow-tie wearing child-man – who declared on national TV that he couldn't go to school because the pupils were not "ladies and gentlemen" and neither were the teachers – turns out to have a suitably freakish family, a clan of Hyacinth Buckets who have stuck planks on their walls to create a mock-Tudor cottage in the middle of a council estate, awarded themselves degrees in metaphysics, and set themselves up as counsellors on the basis of their "life experience".

Eccentricity enough, you might think, for the average documentary. But presenter Keith Allen then turns the camera on itself. Why, it asks, if this family is so easily mocked, are we doing this? And why are you watching it, colluding in their ambitions to TV fame? Allen is sneering, two-faced and far from objective, and when we're shown Lauren's (as James is now called) *Big Brother* audition tape, things click into place: the Harries family has lost its grip on reality; gorging on 'truthful' documentaries and 'reality' TV, we risk doing the same.

Jon Ogilvie

Fortan Times Verdict

A STRANGE, DISTURBING CASE.
A STRANGE, DISTURBING FILM

7

WITCH-HUNT

MARK PILKINGTON WELCOMES THE DVD RELEASE OF TWO IMPORTANT DOCUMENTARIES

Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills + Paradise Lost 2: Revelations (1996/2000)
Dir Joe Berlinger, Bruce Sinofsky
Warp Films DVD £19.99

West Memphis, Arkansas, 6 May 1993. The mutilated bodies of three young boys are found in a wooded ditch behind the Blue Beacon Truck Wash. As word of the discovery spreads through the small, rural Bible Belt community, so do the rumours. Police immediately interview 18-year-old Damien Echols, the towns token troubled goth, and his friend Jason Baldwin. Days later, 17-year-old Jessie Misskelley is subjected to 12 hours of police questioning, without access to a lawyer or parent. Only the last 46 minutes are recorded, during which time Jessie confesses to having looked on as Damien and Jason committing the crimes. All three are arrested on murder charges.

So begins the harrowing tale of the West Memphis Three, all currently languishing in Arkansas jails. Echols, who during the course of the films reveals himself to be significantly more thoughtful and intelligent than many of the grown adults around him, is on death row. Originally commissioned by HBO in America, *Paradise Lost* documents the trial, while the sequel deals with its aftermath, climaxing with their first appeal. Directors Berlinger and Sinofsky, who more recently documented the collapse and regeneration of metal monsters Metallica, who also provide the soundtrack to these two films, gained unprecedented access to the initial trial: the suspects, lawyers on both sides as well as all the families concerned.

What makes the story – and these two films – of particularly foreboding interest is that the key plank in the prosecution's case against the three teens, and particularly Damien Echols, was that these were "occult" or "Satanic" killings. In other circumstances their evidence would be laughable. Their "occult expert", Dr Dale W Griffiths, notes that Satanists often wear black T-shirts and dye their hair black (Echols' hair is naturally black); it was a Full Moon on the night of the killings and the date, 5 May, was close to the "Satanic" holiday of Beltane (1 May). There was no blood at the scene, according to Griffiths, because it may have been stored for drinking or bathing in at another grisly Satanic ceremony. Despite the fact that Griffiths' mail-order PhD, from Columbia Pacific College, required no actual learning to be done, his testimony proved crucial in securing the Three's convictions. The prosecution also pointed to the interest of Echols – a self-professed Wiccan at the time – in the "Satanist" Aleister Crowley, and his infamous gag about performing 150 child sacrifices a year, as proof that Echols had had ritual murder in mind.

What the *Paradise Lost* films make devastatingly



clear is that this was a case of a shocked, highly religious community closing ranks against outsiders – be they cultural or geographical – in their midst. Aside from their animosity to Echols and friends, a telling moment comes when a defence expert is mocked by the prosecution simply because he is from California. Interestingly, the film makers say that they didn't set out to exonerate the three teens; it was only as they began researching the case and speaking to those involved that they realised what they were dealing with.

More disturbing than any horror fiction, *The Paradise Lost* films will leave you seething with frustration at the apparent helplessness of the Three, despite the mass of evidence gathered by their lawyers and supporters, much of it pointing towards John Byers, the Bible-thumping, gun-toting, amphetamine-guzzling stepfather of one of the victims.

What happened to the West Memphis Three could have happened to any of us foreruns, and echoes the numerous false accusations of Satanic ritual abuse that emerged in the US and UK in the late '80s and early '90s. The Three, particularly Echols, who remains on death row, are being punished for being different from those around them. Change the surroundings to 17th-century Massachusetts and this could be a fly-on-the wall film about the events at Salem: the same primal dynamics of ignorance and suspicion, bolstered by religiously motivated fear, are clearly at work. Both films cover events in gripping (often excruciating and grisly) detail, building up a lucid picture of a terrible and tragically relentless miscarriage of justice.

For more information on the films and this case visit Free the West Memphis Three: www.wm3.org

SHORTS

DETECTIVE



(Optimum, £19.99)
Probably Jean Luc Godard's last wholly enjoyable film, 1985's *Detective* was the formidable Frenchman's idea of a 'commercial' film: it takes a slim Parisian murder mystery and turns it into a beautifully crafted work of labyrinthine philosophical complexity.

THE ADJUSTER

(Network DVD, £19.99)

A genuinely bizarre, subtly unsettling account of multiple sexual obsessions and differing forms of corruption from Atom Egoyan, delivered in the director's typically polished and oblique style.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE BOOK DVD/BOOK BOX SET

(Universal Pictures DVD, £19.99)

You'd have thought Kurt Vonnegut's surreal semi-autobiographical tragicomedy about a man 'unstuck in time' – caught between the horrors of the Dresden firestorm and a four-dimensional future alien race – to be unfilmable, but it's surprisingly well served by George Roy Hill's 1972 adaptation.

LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD

(Optimum, £19.99)

Alain Resnais's best-known film finally makes it to DVD, where it looks lovely but remains as frustratingly incommunicative as ever – film equivalent of the nouveau roman or cinematic white elephant?

EL CHUPACABRAS

(Screen Entertainment, £15.99)



This woolly, straight-to-video monster movie wheels out a recognisable goatstucker, but soon abandons its flirtation with psychosocial explanations for sub-X-files government conspiracies and alien intervention, one for crypto-horror completists.



Destroy All Humans!

THQ/Pandemic PS2, Xbox £34.99



What with *War of the Worlds* on our cinema screens and *Area 51* on our PCs, alien invasions are enjoying a high profile right now. *Destroy All Humans!* brings them to PS2 and Xbox with an added twist: this time around, you get to do the invading. Taking on the role of Cryptosporidian 137 – a gung-ho, wise-cracking little grey man and the spearhead of the Furon invasion – you find yourself sent to 1950s Earth to perform a variety of tasks – harvesting brain stems (sucking them from humans makes a satisfying ‘plop’ sound), abducting human womenfolk and killing cows, for example.

You have a number of useful abilities – reading humans’ minds and hearing their (usually sexual and often perverse) private thoughts, passing among them by taking on the appearance of one of them, levitating objects, and – if all else fails – using your anal probe.

With its varied missions, rambling environments, and love of wanton carnage, *DAH* has learned a lot from the *Grand Theft Auto* series – though you shouldn’t expect their sophisticated humour here. Instead, *Destroy All Humans!* happily plunders every alien text from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Plan 9 From Outer Space* to *Men in Black* and *Mars Attacks*, revelling in

referentiality rather than originality. Which isn’t to say it’s not good – just that in terms of both gameplay and content, there’s actually nothing very new here once you strip away the initial novelty of the concept. Still, levitating cows is a profound pleasure not offered by any other game I’m familiar with, and the whole thing possesses a quirky compulsiveness and an attractive, kitschy visual sheen that raises it way above the blandness of so many PS2 titles.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

GOOD OLD-FASHIONED BRAIN-SUCKING, ANAL-PROBING FUN

8

Doom 3

Activision/ID Xbox £39.99

When the Xbox was first launched for a cautious audience three years ago, some said it was merely a PC crammed into a VCR box. Arguments aside, the Xbox’s similar build to the home computer gives developers a big advantage when porting games made for PC onto the system. *Doom 3* is one of the latest games to be ported over, and it’s a sterling job.

For those not familiar with the *Doom* series, you play a marine in the far future sent to deal with problems at a secret research station on Mars. By “research”, I mean devil worshipping, and by “problems”, I mean hordes of demons. As for dealing with them... I’ll just get my guns.

The original *Doom*, released in

1994 by Id Software, is one of the best-selling, PC first person shooters of all time. Great graphics for its day, well designed levels and, most importantly, mountains of gore and guts which all combined to create a pretty terrifying experience. This latest incarnation is actually a retelling of the first game’s events within a far tighter narrative structure.

Translating the stunning graphics engine from the PC version onto the Xbox has been done exceptionally well, retaining all the former’s graphic effects; bump mapping, embedded videos, real-time lighting and even a cool heat distortion around flames and large explosions. The game levels have been clipped slightly to alleviate loading times and accommodate the lower specs of the Xbox compared to the PC, but this is not a bad thing. I actually found this version played faster, and with more pace, than the PC version.

The game sports an excellent surround-sound mix. A cacophony of disturbing environmental noises and effects (listen when you pick up some body armour – it sounds like Darth Vader screeching!), plus excellent use of light and shadow in the level design, creates a game that’s pretty scary in places. But don’t worry – if the hordes of hell are getting you down, you can play co-op over system link or Xbox Live. This mode lets two players blast their way through zombie carnage and chat using the headsets. It’s great fun and works well, which is fortunate because the Deathmatch mode on Xbox Live suffered from some lag.

What about the game’s own demons? Well, the controls are good, apart from a rather too helpful auto aim, switched on by default; if a putrid zombie is walking near an explosive barrel you might find it hard making zombie salsa, because the auto aim locks on the enemy and not the barrel. There is minor slowdown in places too, but

it rarely detracts from the experience. However, the *Doom 3* multiplayer on Xbox Live seems to lag, especially on some Deathmatch levels.

So, to summarise: it’s great. If you haven’t played the PC version you are in for a gung-ho, sci-fi horror treat with some of the best graphics on Xbox; and even veterans of the

PC version might fancy giving the excellent co-op mode a look. If you are a first person shooter fan...

Welcome to Mars, marine!

Alexander Norman

Fortean Times Verdict

POSSIBLY EVEN BETTER THAN THE PC VERSION

9

Freedom Force vs the Third Reich

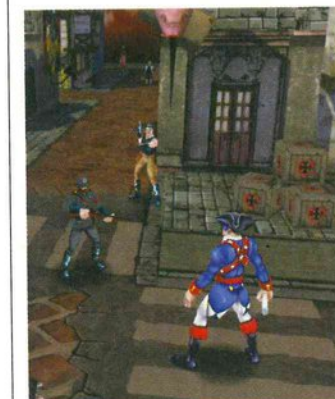
Digital Jesters/Irrational PC £29.99

It’s great to see that the original *Freedom Force* was successful enough to warrant this sequel, as this hilarious pastiche of early superhero comics was a breath of fresh air, not to mention one of the most original and enjoyable strategy games of recent years.

So what has this sequel given us? Well... a hilarious pastiche of early superhero comics. There are some graphical improvements and tweaks, but this is otherwise identical to the original and, while still enjoyable, something of a missed opportunity. There are many other sections of comic book history that it would be nice to see turned into games.

The Irrational team showed inventiveness and imagination in putting together the original *Freedom Force*, and it’s a pity that such creativity wasn’t used as much while crafting the sequel. *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich* is not a bad game by any means – it’s just as good as the original. The point of sequels, however, is to try to be better and to bring something new, and this is where it falls short.

Ben Hawes



Fortean Times Verdict

ATTACK OF THE CLONED SEQUEL – DISAPPOINTING

7

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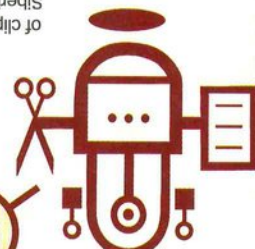
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Send to: Reviews Editor, **Fortean Times**, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD, UK.

Caveat

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Why Fortean?

'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credibility: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the medieval fool: "The fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the wit does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** does no party line.

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena

and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932). Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term

Special Correspondents



AUSTRALIA Paul Cropper (NSW), Arthur Chrenkoff (Qld), Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Richard Seary (Qld), Margaret Walsh (Vic), Len Watson (Qld), **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC), Max McLaughlin (Ont), **CYBERSPACE** Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Dawn Cobé, Andy Cobley, Neil L Inglis, Jeff Koyen, Michael Newton, Steve Scanlon, Jody Zoll. **ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, Lionel Beer, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Alison Elzium, Peter Hope-Evans, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Dave Fiddimore, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Lindsey Kay, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Mallin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Paul Scretion, Roman Suchy, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Sarah Walsh, Nick Warren, Jason Winter, Bobby Zodiak. **FRANCE** Heather Fowler, **GERMANY** Ulrich Maglin, Cliff Wren, **GUERNSEY** Steve Page, **HOLLAND** Robin Pascoe, **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Mags Glennon, Andrew Munro, Doc Shiels. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron, **MALTA** Pierre Bonello, **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall, **ROMANIA** Iosif Boccor, **SCOTLAND** David Burns, Roger Musson, Leslie John Thomson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosen, **THAILAND** Chits Williams, USA Larry Arnold (PA), Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Barbara Millspaw (CO), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Ron Rosenblatt (NY), Robert Whitaker-Singano (DE), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (TX), Gary Yates (UT). **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord.

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COMPETITIONS

1 THE OUTER LIMITS VOLUMES 1 AND 2

Running from 1963 to 1965, *The Outer Limits* was a classic SF anthology show in the tradition of *The Twilight Zone* and one of the most memorable series of the era. Featuring a galaxy of bizarre and often terrifying monsters and plots exploring time travel, nuclear disasters and alien contact, *The Outer Limits* was Cold War America's weekly encounter with its own worst nightmares.

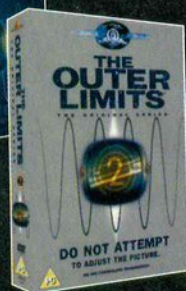
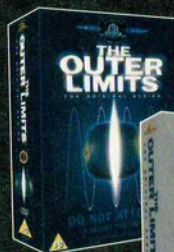
The series also includes early appearances from many actors who would later become famous, including Robert Duvall, Warren

Oates, Ed Asner, Martin Sheen and - in pre-*Star-Trek* appearances - William Shatner and Leon and Nimoy.

Now you can enjoy all 49 episodes of *The Outer Limits* in these two multi-disk DVD sets (combined retail

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DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ADJUST THE PICTURE - just get ready for some classic viewing.

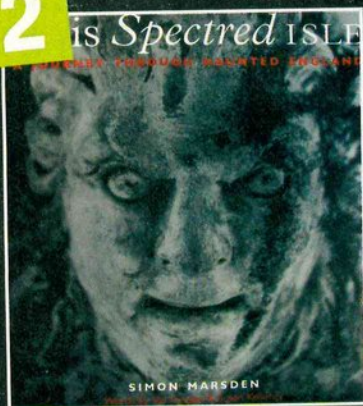


THANKS TO MGM DVD, WE HAVE THREE SETS OF **THE OUTER LIMITS VOLUMES 1 AND 2** TO GIVE AWAY. TO WIN, JUST TELL US:

Q: IN EPISODE 'COLD HANDS, WARM HEART', WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE SPACE PROGRAMME THAT WILLIAM SHATNER'S CHARACTER WORKS FOR?

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2 This Spectred Isle



THIS SPECTRED ISLE: A JOURNEY THROUGH HAUNTED BRITAIN

Acclaimed photographer Simon Marsden is a great believer in ghosts. For him, Britain's old buildings are not just architectural curiosities or historical artefacts, they're hubs of paranormal intrigue and mystery - so his photographs of English Heritage buildings from Cornwall to Lindisfarne do not just show, guidebook style, the immediately apparent, but hint at the fantastic and supernatural lurking behind the gargoyles and

crumbling façades.

Collected here in *This Spectred Isle: A Journey Through Haunted England* (published by English Heritage at £22.99), his pictures are accompanied by tales of the buildings' spirits, myths and assorted weirdness - from headless drummer boys to mermen, spectral skeletal carriages and boggarts.

THANKS TO ENGLISH HERITAGE, WE HAVE FIVE COPIES OF **THIS SPECTRED ISLE** TO GIVE AWAY. JUST TELL US:

Q: MARSDEN'S PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY KICKS OFF AT ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT - WHICH GIANT SUPPOSEDLY BUILT THIS CASTLE?

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THRILLER 15 DVD BOX SET

3

In the 1970s - a televisual golden age for all kinds of reasons, not least the absence of 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire' from Britain's TV schedules - Saturday night telly was a dark and terrifying affair, thanks to **Thriller**. Created by Brian Clemens, this menacing, suspenseful horror series, with its eerie title sequence and deranged theme music, featured everything from time-travelling serial killers to Devil-worshipping countryfolk. Each episode of Clemens's classic anthology featured a different



cast, boasting turns from the likes of Brian Blessed, Diana Dors, Robert Powell, Hayley Mills and Denholm Elliott. The complete series - featuring every episode from all six seasons, plus 'Who Killed Lamb', a thriller special from 1974 starring Stanley Baker - is now available as a massive 43-episode, 15-disc set, retailing at £99.99 and with a total running time of 2150 minutes. Network DVD are offering one of these sets to a lucky FT reader - simply answer the question below.

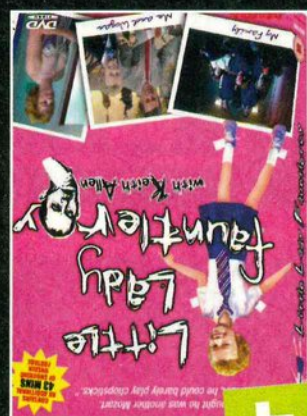


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JUST TELL US:

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no qualifications at all other than 'life experience'. They are desperate for TV fame, even though it's hard to imagine a TV appearance in which they could come out favourably. They blatantly don't here. But then neither does the presenter, Keith Allen, who pulls faces, makes snide remarks, and even storms out after yelling at them in a restaurant. The whole thing is horrific, and incredibly funny. The extras - the clips of unseen outtakes - are particularly disturbing. Look out for Lauren doing cabaret....

HOW TO ENTER

Send a postcard with your title, forename, surname, address and postcode, daytime tel, mobile tel and e-mail address, plus the CS code of your preferred prize to **FORTEAN TIMES** giveaways, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ to arrive by 30 September 2005. Please state your year of birth and if you are a current subscriber. Send a separate card for each draw you enter. Or e-mail competitions:forteanimes@dennis.co.uk. No more than one entry per household.

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COMPETITION AND GIVEAWAY RULES OF ENTRY

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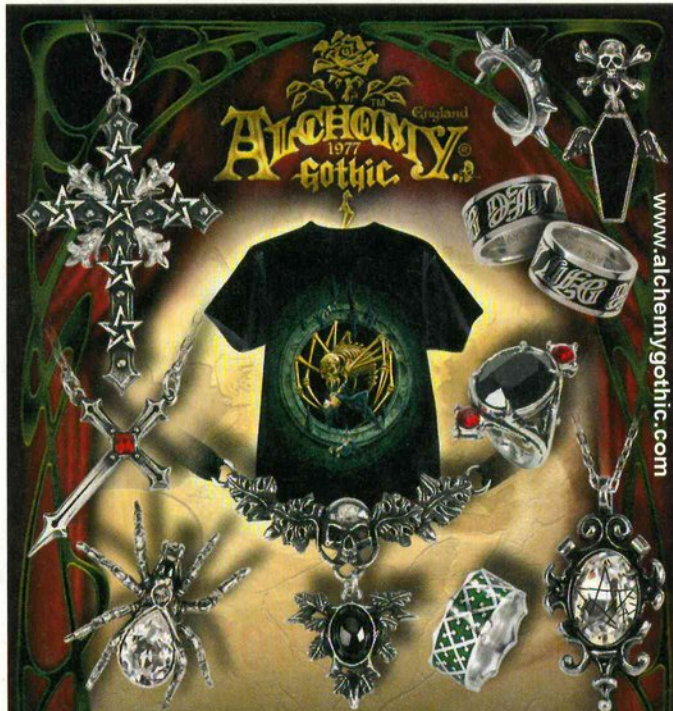
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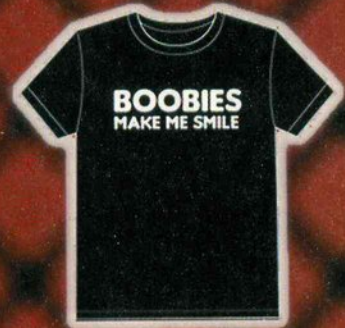
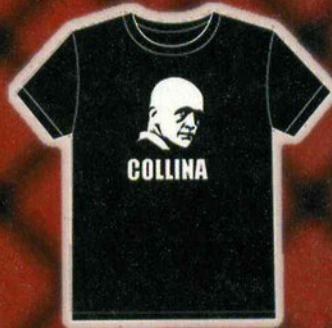
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letters



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Banshee's wail

The notation of the Banshee's wail that puzzled Edward Krause [FT197:76] probably first appeared in Vol. III of Mr and Mrs SC Hall's *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character &c.* (London 1843), and was later reproduced in WB Yeats's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (London 1888). The Halls gave no source for it. Patricia Lyaght includes it and a few other 19th-century notions of the Banshee's cry in *The Banshee: The Irish Death Messenger* (Boulder, Colorado, 1986), pp.296-8. "All of these," she writes, "appear to be ordinary airs casually ascribed to the death-messenger perhaps by informants keen to please a curious and unsuspecting inquirer or indeed by the authors themselves for some unknown reason" (p.171).

Brian Chapman

Victoria, British Columbia

Facts and theories

There seems to be a bit of confusion in the letters pages about the difference between facts and theories, specifically in regard to evolution [FT198:74-75]. The facts of the matter are the tangibles – that there are fossils in the rocks, that these rocks form layers and that there is a trend from simpler to more complex organisms as the layers rise towards the surface. The theories include both the general idea of what these represent (evolution and creation) and the specific ideas of how these came about (the versions of evolution and different creation accounts). To dub evolution a fact is a piece of sophistry intended to end a debate before it even begins, in much the same way that a believer might say that God is a fact and expect all to believe fossils represent a record of evolution, the remains of animals killed in the flood, bones of giants and dragons from the mythic past or even a hilarious joke put in by God to

mock the scientists, you accept the fact that those fossils are there in the ground.

That still leaves all the Damned Data such as fossilised plugs and other mysterious finds that nobody, creationist or evolutionist, seems willing to discuss... (if they exist, of course).

DJ Tyer

Southend-on-Sea, Essex

Filmic falls

Dean Ballinger [FT196:73] asks if films other than *Le Dernier Combat* (Luc Besson 1983 – not "Bison") and *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) featured fortran falls of fauna. *The Last Wave* (Peter Weir, 1977) includes a rain of frogs in one scene, one of a series of anomalous events presaging an apocalypse.

Inanna Arthen

By email

The opening scene of *The Last Wave*, one of the most authentic fortran films ever made, shows a fall of blocks and spheres of ice crashing down on the roof of a rural schoolhouse. When I saw the film at the old Thalia film revival house in Manhattan in the 1980s, a number of bizarre things happened, including a man in the audience who laughed hysterically whenever the name "Jesus" was mentioned and a boy outside the theatre riding a black bicycle with the number 666 painted on it in white.

Ron Rosenblatt

New York

There is a fall of roads in the X-files episode "Die Hand Die Verletzt" (series 2 – first screened January 1995). Admittedly this is not a film, but it might well have been an influence on the later *Magnolia*. As this fall is apparently the work of the Devil, it puts it into a very special class of fortran phenomena.

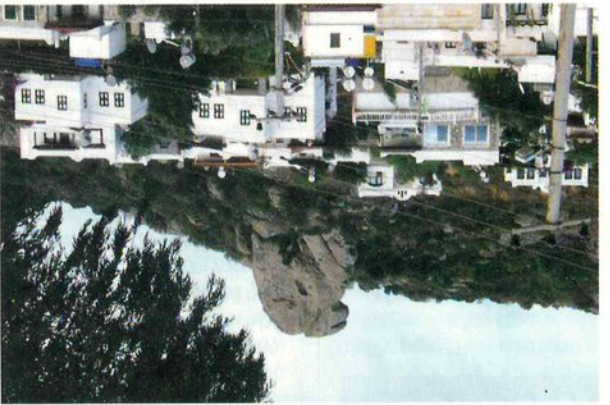
Tim Gooderham

Chaldon, Surrey

Treading on the dead

I spent part of my childhood in New Caledonia, a French overseas territory northeast of Australia. At

Simulacra Corner



This photograph was taken in November 2004 by Louise Wade. She writes: "The rock formation resembles a monkey squatting guard-like – or about to pounce, depending on your imagination – over the small village of Yallikavak, near Bodrum, on the Aegean coast of Turkey."

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box months of FTs free for any use.

One day, my brother went to fetch wild oranges in the tropical wood nearby. He found it easier if he stepped on a series of flat stones strewn around the trees. They were

one point, my father bought a plot of land and tried to grow produce. It was a pleasant, secluded place, with lots of shade against the blazing sun, located between a hill and a small stream. One of the few problems we had was that our neighbour was slowly going mad. She lived in an isolated colonial house on the hill behind our plot. When my mother was unlucky enough to run into her, that lady would describe how "they" come to my house" and "they" stand on the verandah", "they" weep and shuffle their feet, and their ankle chains rattle", etc. Her eyes were wide with terror as she spoke. A few months later, we heard that her husband had given up trying to comfort her and had taken her to the mental asylum in Noumea, New Caledonia's main city. She never came back.

Valerie Dabbs

By email

One day, my brother went to fetch wild oranges in the tropical wood nearby. He found it easier if he stepped on a series of flat stones strewn around the trees. They were

White noise music

I was very interested to read the recent article about the electronic voice phenomenon [FT194:26-30]. I first became aware of EVP in the 1970s when psychic Dora Van Gelder called my attention to the activities of Andrija Puharich who was experimenting with voices found in radio static and on unmiked tape recordings. Over the years, I have collected some information on the relationship of the phenomenon to brain and central nervous system function and I have performed one non-controlled experiment.

The brain relies on the presence of continuous, varied sensory information to function properly. When an individual's vision, hearing and touch are insufficient, the effect is disorienting. In a series of experiments at McGill University, DO Hebb showed that when sensory input becomes limited, unchanging and monotonous, the brain's incoming sensory systems shut down and subjects experience spontaneous sensations from inside the brain that appear real.¹

The "ganzfeld" was an early investigation into how continuous, unvarying stimulation causes visual receptor cells to fatigue and shut off. The ganzfeld was conceived as a large, featureless, spherical white field for experimental subjects to look into. By contrast, the current concept of the ganzfeld is usually two halves of a ping-pong ball held up to the eyes by a pair of glasses. In any case, when the eyes are exposed simultaneously to light of all colours (white) without details on which to focus, the visual cells in the eyes stop functioning and essentially stop providing meaningful visual information to the brain. At this point, the brain may begin receiving visual images including colourful designs and pictures. One experimental subject reported seeing cartoon-like letters, words and musical notes that grew little pipe stem arms and legs and danced across his field of vision. This is especially striking to me because it mirrors the images reported to me by a patient with Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease (CJD), also known as Spastic Pseudosclerosis. This is an



infectious brain disease that is contacted by eating the brain of a human or animal that has contracted the disease. He had recently visited areas of Africa containing the infection, where he was exposed to food containing human brains.

In hearing, the logical equivalent to the ganzfeld is white noise. White noise results from playing every frequency of sound at the same time. It sounds like falling rain, the babbling of the brook, or the static between radio stations. After being locked in a soundproof, anechoic

Our conscious mind fills in the gaps with what we expect

chamber at Harvard University, the contemporary composer John Cage discovered that the background noise of the human nervous system sounds like white noise.² When

white noise is played at sufficient volume, it overloads and fatigues the auditory receptor cells in the inner ear, and quiets any perception of sound. I reasoned that, if receptor cell fatigue from white light can produce images originating in the visual system, then white noise should be able to elicit spontaneous, audible sensations.

I tested this hypothesis in 1979 when I performed a psychological experiment with white noise. First, I built a solid-state white noise generator, which amplified the sound produced by transistor overload. To avoid damaging the ears at volumes high enough to cover external sounds, I added in a high-frequency electric filter. White noise with the highest frequencies attenuated is sometimes called "pink noise."

To perform my little experiment, I gathered three men and one woman into a room. They were unknown to me and did not know about the experiment until I asked them to participate. My instructions were: "I want to play something for you and I'd like you to tell me what you hear."

I had connected my white noise generator circuit to an audio amplifier, which was connected to a

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

John Cage: "There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of a special material, a room without echoes."¹

"In the late Forties, I found out by experiment... that silence is not acoustic. It is a change of mind, a turning around. I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University, and in this room, I heard two sounds.² The reason I did

not expect to hear those two sounds was that they were set into vibration without any intention on my part.³ I thought there was something wrong with the room, and I told the engineer there were two sounds. He said describe them, and I did. Well," he said, the high one was your nervous system and the low one was your blood circulating.⁴ It was this experience and the white paintings of

Rauschenberg that led me to compose 4'33", my silent piece."⁵

I have duplicated Cage's experiment and I have heard the two sounds described above. Rather than the noise in the nervous system, I think it more likely that the high-pitched noise that Cage heard is the background noise in the auditory system,

occurring between the inner ear itself and the auditory cortex. This tone also resembles the sound of tinnitus, or "ringing in the ears,"

that everyone experiences after auditory receptor cells are temporarily overloaded by a loud noise. In chronic tinnitus, a medical condition, this high-pitched sound occurs as a result of hearing loss or damage to the nervous system hearing pathways, probably in the inner ear.

REFERENCES

- 1 John Cage, lost citation.
- 2 John Cage, Kyoto lecture, Nov 1989 and published in *Southwest Review*, 1991.
- 3 John Cage: *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- 4 Richard Kostelanetz, Ed: *Conversing with Cage*, Limelight Press, pp.228-229, 1998.
- 5 John Cage, Kyoto lecture, op. cit.



negative or evil about the stone itself, the danger relates purely to the undirected negative intention words. The area will continue to have great problems unless the words have their physical manifestation removed.

An anonymous magician
By email

FT delivery
In response to Emma Brown's letter regarding the weird delivery of *Fortean Times* [FT198:73], she's not the only one! Our post is usually delivered at around 9am, but FT is always on the mat before I get up at around seven. One morning this March, I was up half an hour earlier than usual and heard something being pushed through the letterbox. I opened the door and there was a little girl, aged no more than 10, knowing who was more surprised, but she wordlessly handed me the mag and pegged it off down the street. There was nobody with her. Is there a simple explanation?

Donna Black
Drakes Broughton, Worcestershire

Around 5.10am on Bank Holiday Monday (30 May 2005), a loud thud woke me from my slumbers. Both my partner and I sat bolt upright in bed, dazed and confused. I went nervously to the door. There, on the mat, was a single item of mail – my July edition of *Fortean Times*. What was going on? Firstly, this was a Bank Holiday – therefore no postal service. Secondly, if it had been wrongly delivered to another house in the street, why would the mysterious post-person have chosen such an unearthly time to deliver it? Well, it could only have happened with the FT and not, for instance, with my July copy of *New Humanist*.

John Bredon
Langley, West Midlands

For several months now, my copy of FT has been delivered between 5.00 and 5.30 in the morning. I've never been able to discover who does this – it's certainly not the postman, who arrives at midday. However, this month, my husband, who happened to be awake at the time, heard the milkman speeding away shortly after the magazine dropped

Da Vinci crud

I liked the article on the "accuracy" of Dan Brown's brilliant screenplay. It's worth pointing out that "Ariagrosa", one of the main "characters" (I use the term loosely) in the book, is a sort of translation into Italian of "red herring". Other inconsistencies include, for example, the use of a piece of church furniture to break a slab on the floor of St Sulpice; in the real world, the thing is so big and heavy that two men can barely lift it. Also, in the real world, just about everybody can figure out idiotic anagrams and many people know what a Fibonacci sequence is, not to mention their knowing that Dan Brown is just a shamelessly plagiaristic thriller writer with an eye for detail second only to that of Colonel Bink, the short-sighted gink, in whose cartoon strips from *The Beezer*, I believe, your readers will find more truth and erudition than in Dan Brown's poorly researched potboiler.

Murdo Macleod
By email

Lifting the curse

I read with interest about the "Curse Stone" of Carlisle [FT197:24]. The quotation by Mark Holliday ("Do those people wanting the stone's removal expect us to believe that the curse behaved like an unguided missile, hitting the wrong target and arriving almost 500 years late?") will raise wry smiles on practising magicians and witches. All magic and other esoteric arts are fundamentally based on focused intention. As the report states, the initial curse was directed at the Border reivers. Also, the highly potent curse was spoken and kept safely out of reach by the "custodians" of the curse; i.e. those who were using it against the reivers. The present problems around the Carlisle region are born of the fact that there is no focused intention and a very large and obvious physical manifestation of this potent negative energy. This means that the entire region is exposed to the power of the curse, and the area being affected is directly proportionate to the strength of the curse – luckily curtailed, as only about a third of the curse is actually carved on the stone. The stone can't be "cleansed" with pendulums etc. There is nothing

Suddenly I reached over and turned off the white noise. The room was as silent as a tomb. Everything that they had heard had been created by their minds. In *Human Information Processing*, psychologists Peter Lindsay and Donald Norman explain how the brain handles series of experiments, they show that every time the image of words and letters are degraded, the brain fills in the gaps so the words make sense, changing their meaning along the way. This is necessary because of the imperfect nature of our sensory systems, the high level of background noise around us and inherent in the nervous system, and our need for near-perfect images and sounds that we can analyse to determine their meaning. As a result, the brain creates much of our sensory experience. Line detector and circle detector networks in the visual system clearly what we see. What we hear is actively processed to accommodate our expectations. In other words, our conscious mind simply invents music for them to hear. Thoughts of musical performance were substituted for reality as we were substituted for reality and these false thoughts were indistinguishable from real experiences.

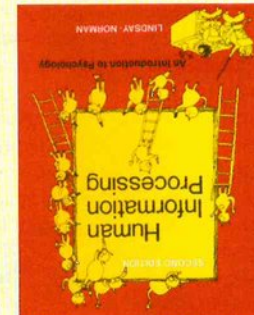
Wes Burgess, MD, PhD
Los Angeles, California

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1 DO Hebb: "The mammal and his environment", *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 826-831, 1955; Woodburn Heron: "The pathology of boredom", *Altered States of Consciousness*, Ch. 7, pp. 60-64, Freeman Press, 1972.

2 John Cage: lecture presented in Kyoto, Japan, in Nov 1989 and published in *Southwest Review*, 1991.

3 Peter Lindsay and Donald Norman: *Human Information Processing*, Academic Press, 1972.



pair of speakers that looked like they were part of a stereo sound system. I turned on the white noise at a somewhat high volume and they listened to it. After 10 minutes, I asked them what they were hearing. The white noise was still playing while they replied. First, all the men agreed they clearly heard music playing loudly against the background of the white noise. The woman said nothing.

The first man described his experience: "In addition to that sound, I clearly hear a rock band. They are playing the song 'Take Me to the River.'"

"I hear a rock band too," said the second man, "but I don't think it is playing the same song."

The third man interrupted "I hear music, too, except it is a marching band. I hear it as plain as day. I used to play in a marching band and I've played this song a hundred times. What's going on, here?"

That left my fourth subject. I later found out that she was an unwilling participant, who had only come at the insistence of her boyfriend. I remember that she was sitting in the far corner of the room, next to an open window, with a scowl on her face. "I don't hear any of that stuff," she said, irritably, "hear nothing at all except that stupid noise."

"So the noise is what you hear?" I asked.

"Yes, stupid. That's all I hear." A moment passed before she added, "Of course I hear the sound of that radio coming in through the window." I looked out and saw that our window was adjacent to another open window in the building next door.

"Tell me about that," I said.

Now she was quite exasperated. "There's nothing to tell," she said curtly, "You can hear it your- self. They are playing the Allman Brothers Band. And they must be playing their music pretty loud if we can hear it over all this dumb noise."

Stone 'shoe'

With reference to Janet Bord's feature "Footprints of the Gods" [FT188:44-45], we found this fascinating stone 'shoe' while walking round Derwent Reservoir on the border of Northumberland and County Durham, in late July 2004 when the water level was quite low. It weighs about 1kg (2.2lb). Close by were some large stones with fossils of what appeared to be grass or small leaves.

Susan and Ian Hamilton

Consett, Co. Durham



through the letterbox. Emma Brown suspected her copy was being delivered by the milkman, so perhaps mine is too. My husband thought that maybe milkmen were being encouraged to diversify into other services because of the decline in home deliveries, but I would be interested to know exactly why *FT* and no other item of post arrives in such a bizarre fashion.

Lynn Reglar
Worcester

Suicidal dogs

I read your article on suicidal dogs [FT196:4] with no more than passing interest until I was given a copy of *Bengal Lancer* by Francis Yeats-Brown, which mentions the same topic (see quotation below). How's that for an appropriately forteen coincidence?

"At Lahore, a strange thing

happened in the gardens of Shahdara. I went to visit Jehangir's tomb there, with a friend and his bull terrier. This dog came with us to the garden, but we tied her up before entering the tomb, out of respect for a Moslem burial-place.

"She whined and yelped, so when we were going up to the roof we asked the resident Imam whether there would be any objection to her following us? The Imam shrugged his shoulders, and said that he had no objection at all, but that he advised us to be careful. My friend loosed her, and she came rejoicing. Another visitor with a dog took his also up to the roof.

"Now the wide flat top of Jehangir's tomb is bounded by a parapet. My friend's bitch hunted about for a moment or two, with her nose down, as if she were following a scent. Then she jumped over the parapet, and was dashed to pieces on the path below.

It happened so quickly there was no time to call her. We ran down and picked her up while she was still breathing, but every bone of her poor body was broken, and she died before we could take her to a vet.

"We did not go back to the

place of tragedy, but next day we heard that the other man's dog had done exactly the same thing a few minutes afterwards. Both animals committed suicide. I can vouch for the facts, but have no explanation to offer, except that conceivably the dogs saw something that we did not."

[From *Bengal Lancer: an ex-Indian Army Officer's memoirs* by Francis Yeats-Brown, first published 1930; this edition Anthony Mott 1954, pp.42-43.]

Alethea Amsden
Norwich, Norfolk

Bit of a backlog

Hello there. I was reading the new issue of your magazine and I think the photo you ran of a young man with a steel spike through his throat was a bit extream. It was a sickening image. [FT186:14]

I thought you might be interested in some things I have come across... I was watching television and there was an ad for 'Devrys University' that offered training in being a 'Buckethead', or a 'Gobb Executive', as career options, also while watching television I saw a guy who had a pancake shaped head completely unrelated to the ad that was running, like some kind of a bizarre manipulation of the film material. Also, on the Internet there was a short video of the winds on the equator of Jupiter, which seem to operate in a contra-rotating way; that is no longer available (something is, but the quality is greatly inferior to what was previously available). With reference to your story on Bigfoot, there was a paperback that came out in 1975 by Sir Edmund Hillary called *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win*; on page 292, there is a photo of a Yeti skin and skullcap...

Have you ever wondered that if the temperatures on Neptune and on Jupiter are what they say - 350 degrees below zero - the atmosphere would be a liquid and not a solid?

I was in Kingston, Ontario, recently at a place called the Bayshore Motel, in room 108, and there was a fast moving shadow that seemed to solidify into an unusual elongated bug that moved very fast over the bed and disappeared beneath a heating vent - all of which were pulled off as if someone had been frantically searching for something.

Have you ever heard of the *Book of*

Enoch? It was discovered by Scottish explorer Robert Bruce in Ethiopia in the 18th century, and translated to English in 1821, by someone named Laurence; the book predates the Bible and has many similarities; it is also available in most good bookstores.

Also, a small comment on the Internet: I have noticed that someone has sent at least 100 messages from one of my e-mail sites... obviously it is not such a great invention if it is prone to such problems!

A small word of advice: I am emailing you from Montreal, PQ, Canada. If you should go to the Parc avenue area near La Cité and the Cinema Du Parc, don't go to the Fifth Avenue Restaurant. I just went there and they charged \$18.00 for a club sandwich and a Perrier (albeit with steak, but not really all that much of it) and the man who worked there had the audacity to lecture me when I said I would not give him a tip after he had the arrogance to ask for one; my decision was based on the high price of the meal, the fact there was no air conditioning (today is about 85°) and the quality of the meal, which of course included shitty salad dressing, shitty French-fries, and canned mushrooms.

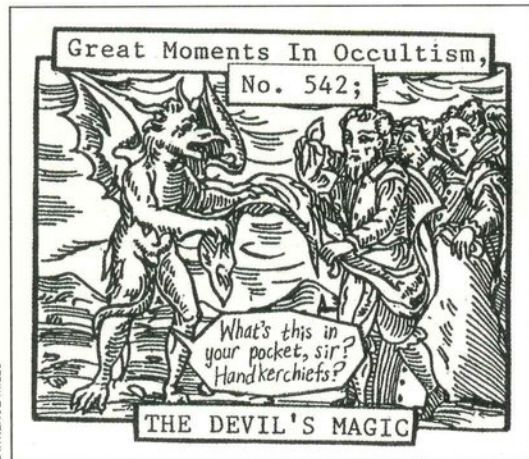
Peace be with you.

Oh yeah - I read the article about remote viewing. That there is some stupid stuff! Exploring the solar system with ESP? What a complete joke! (If the winds move contra-rotating on the Jovian equator, that would suggest a tall mountain range on the planet's equator; either that or alien technology - I find mountains easier to cope with)

Last but not least, I recently bought a CD of the band Simple Minds that had Bono of U2 on one of the tracks... the next day Bono was nowhere to be heard on the CD and a strange monster like face appeared on my television several times while I was watching regular programming; no sound, just desiccated features on what appeared to be a young man's face of about 25 and a round mouth revealing lines of tiny pointed teeth, complete with blank stare. It only lasted for about two seconds.

Sorry there is so much stuff here - I like to bring these things up with other people whenever possible. I have a bit of a backlog at the moment. [sic throughout.]

G Remington
via email



Vanishing act

Chris Newport's account of a vanishing coin [FT174:74] reminds me of an incident that occurred over 30 years ago in my hometown of Dorchester, Dorset, when I was about 10. While playing in my back garden, I discovered a Roman coin. I was absolutely astonished and couldn't believe my good luck. I took it indoors, showed my parents, and cleaned it off, revealing an emperor's head on one side and two soldiers standing either side of a standard on the other. I told my teacher at school and just about everyone else. For safekeeping, I put it in an envelope and left it on the sideboard, but it disappeared. I have no idea what happened to it and my parents were as baffled as I was. I'm quite relieved to learn that other people have lost things in similar circumstances, but as a long-time forer, I just wonder if it might not turn up again someday, just as unexpectedly! I'll keep you posted...

Mark Ellis
Weymouth, Dorset

Always worth asking

I've noted with interest the letters you've had from people who've lost keys and the like, and been absolutely stumped until they asked for them back very politely, and then found the keys shortly after. I've never seen a ghost, or felt anything when other people (such as my mother or grandmother or wife) have, and never thought I would. However, we did have an interesting experience recently.

Staying in the Tudor part of the Georgian House Hotel in Haslemere in the summer of 2004, we came back to our room mid-afternoon to give our one-year-old daughter a sleep. My wife let us in as she had the room key – normally I keep hold of the keys wherever we are, as she has an unenviable record of losing them. I took the two older children swimming, came back later and we all got ready to go out – I asked for the room key, and my wife immediately went on the defensive, saying that she had no idea where it was. So we looked, couldn't find it, notified the front desk that we were keyless and went out. We came back quite late, put the children into their beds and turned the room upside down looking for the key. At the third time of looking I stood by the door of the room and did just that. We all carried on looking, and after a few minutes my wife went to the door of the room and yelped – a large cupboard by the door had shifted away from the wall and the key was in the depression in the carpet where the cupboard foot had been. She was quite spooked, as she'd looked under



Key story

Andrew Shilcock
By email

My eldest daughter has to be restrained now from asking 'The Pottergeist' whenever anything doesn't come to hand!

After gardening one day last autumn, I couldn't find the older key to our shed (we have another) so looked fairly thoroughly in pockets and garden without success. Yesterday [6 November 2004] I found it on top of our dog's harness on an easy chair in the kitchen, as if it had fallen from the ceiling. I know that it was not there a few days before when I took the cushion from the chair to kneel on while looking for something else, and it was on top of the harness, not underneath it. It felt neither hot nor cold. What this means I can't begin to work out – but it's very odd.

David Gannon

By email

The way of Zen

When I was young – in the early 1950s – I used to watch my father move a needle that he would float on the surface tension in a half glass of water. Getting the darn needle to float was hard enough for me, but then he'd stand back across the room and call that he was going to make it spin clockwise or counter-clockwise. And he would. He could start it in one direction, stop it and start it going the other direction. I never managed more than a slight bob that just made the needle sink to the bottom. My father always told me that the way to do it was by "not-trying" – a wonderfully Zen explanation from someone who had most probably never heard of, much less studied, Zen practice or thought.

Manlynn Zavitz
Toronto, Canada

Birth cluster

As I drove to work on 12 January [2005], I listened to a report on the BBC World Service about a new book on coincidences. When I arrived at work, the co-worker who has shared an office next to me for over a year asked if my birthday was 13 January and if I would be 40. I was able to confirm both. She told me she was also going to be 40 the next day. About an hour later, I was on the phone with a recruiter in another state, whom I had not spoken to before. As he reviewed my resume, he remarked that he was going to be 40 on the same day as me. Two days later as I was waiting for a friend in a hotel lobby I overheard an employee wish a man "happy birthday for yesterday". I asked him how old he was yesterday and he confirmed, as I already suspected, "40". I have never previously met anyone born on the same day as me.

Ian Gourley
Indianapolis, Indiana

haunted".

When I told my mother we'd been staying there, she immediately said: "Oh yes, that's maybe I have now felt something. More than one thing, actually. Just waiting. So someone or something waiting on the landing – was absolutely convinced that there was my jacket, went back for it and for some reason We checked out two days later – I nearly forgot but you aren't alone..."

That was nothing for it but to say thank you very graciously and go to bed. My wife passed a very restless night – though I was unworried, as I felt that if there were anything there it was benign. I woke up at 4:30am to see her standing by my bed looking at my alarm clock, which hadn't gone off, though it was set for 4:30. She had no explanation for why she had got up and gone to look at it. I got up to go, and she told me that I couldn't leave her on her own. Ah, I said, that you aren't alone...

There was nothing for it but to admit it. door, and didn't want to admit it. them outside the room in a little cubbyhole by the keys was that shed thought that she might've left that the reason she'd been defensive about the against the wall. My wife was moved to confess Certainly, earlier on in the day it had been flat had the baby's travel cot in front of the wardrobe. noticed that it had moved out from the wall (as the wardrobe not long before, and we also hadn't

PHENOMENOMIX

HUNT EMMERSON

IN HONOUR OF 200 ISSUES OF YOUR FAVOURITE MAGAZINE, I WILL NOW ATTEMPT TO DEPICT 200 FORTHEAN EVENTS* IN TWO PAGES OF COMICS!



*TAKEN FROM THE BOOKS OF CHARLES FORT - DOVER PUBLICATIONS 1974

YES, 200 PHENOMENA BETWEEN HERE AND THE FINAL FRAME IN THE BOTTOM RIGHT HAND CORNER! I MUST HAVE COMPLETE SILENCE PLEASE!



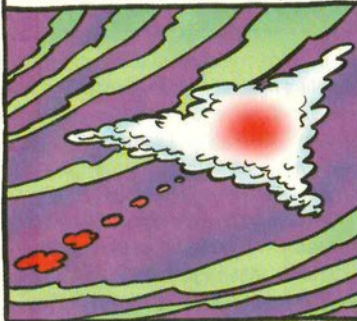
WE START WITH BENJAMIN BATHURST, WHO, IN 1809, WALKED AROUND SOME HORSES HE WAS EXAMINING AND WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN!



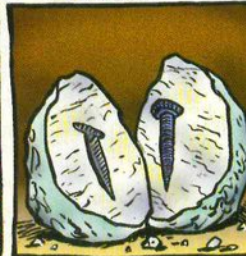
1794 - FALL OF STONES IN SIENA, ITALY...



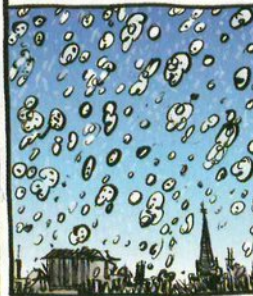
1852 - A TRIANGULAR CLOUD IN A STORM, WITH A RED NUCLEUS AND A LONG "TAIL"



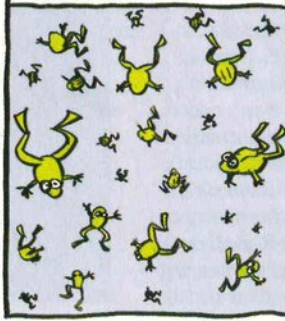
1851 - A SIXPENNY IRON NAIL FOUND INSIDE A LUMP OF QUARTZ, WHEN THE LUMP WAS SPLIT...



1894 - FROGSPAWN FALLS FROM THE SKY ONTO BATH, ENGLAND...



AT THE SAME TIME, SMALL FROGS RAINED ON WIGAN, UK...



1871 - A "STORM OF GLUTINOUS DROPS" FALLS, AGAIN AT BATH...

...AND SEVERAL DAYS LATER, MORE FELL AT THE SAME PLACE!

1911 - BUCKS, UK - GROUND COVERED WITH MASSES OF JELLY...

1835 - GOTH, GERMANY - JELLY LIKE MASS ON THE GROUND, THIS TIME ASSOCIATED WITH A METEORITE!

JUST A MINUTE! THOSE LAST FOUR - YOU HAVEN'T DEPICTED THEM - YOU JUST TAGGED THEM ONTO THAT DRAWING OF SOME FROGS!

WHAT? OH, YEAH... WELL - HOW MUCH JELLY DO YOU WANT ME TO DRAW? ANYWAY, EXCUSE ME, I'M LOSING TIME AND SPACE HERE...



...25...
...25...
OK, THAT'S TEN! NUMBER ELEVEN...



DEC. 1883 - TWO ENORMOUS SHINING WHEELS APPEAR IN THE WATER ALONGSIDE A SHIP IN THE PERSIAN GULF...



1901 - PERSIAN GULF - ROTATING SHAFTS OF LIGHT IN THE WATER...

1880 - MALABAR COAST - SEA ILLUMINATED BY SHAFTS OF LIGHT IN WAVES...

1906 - GULF OF OMAN - "SHAFTS OF BRILLIANT LIGHT"...

1907 - MALACCA STRAIT - THE SAME PHENOMENON!

...AND I HAVE DATA FOR AT LEAST FIVE MORE!

IN 1885, NEAR YOKAHAMA, A FIERY MASS FELL FROM THE SKY INTO THE SEA...



1887 - A LARGE BALL OF FIRE RISES FROM THE SEA, NEAR CAPE RACE...



...AND IN 1845 3 LUMINOUS BODIES ARE SEEN TO RISE FROM THE SEA!

YOU'RE DOING IT AGAIN!



YES I AM! NOW WILL YOU PLEASE STAND ASIDE, SIR! OK - THAT'S 25!



25? I MAKE IT 23... YOU'VE COUNTED THOSE THREE LUMINOUS BODIES AS 3 PHENOMENA, HAVEN'T YOU!



FOR GOD'S SAKE - I'LL NEVER GET THROUGH THEM OTHERWISE!



OK OK... JUST CHECKING...



RIGHT! THAT'S 25-25!



1890 - CALABRIA - A RAIN OF BLOOD...



1892 - A LUMINOUS OBJECT TRAVELS BACK AND FORTH IN THE SKY IN SWEDEN...



1905 - LLANGOLLEN, WALES - AN "INTENSELY BLACK OBJECT" ABOUT TWO MILES UP...



1898 - LILLE, FRANCE - A RECTANGULAR COLOURED OBJECT IN THE SKY...



1902 - SOUTH DEVON - IN THE SKY, A GREAT NUMBER OF HIGHLY COLOURED OBJECTS LIKE LITTLE SUNS...

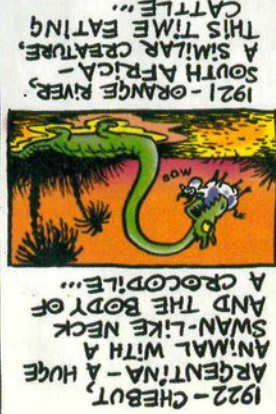
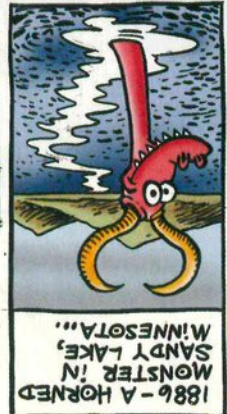
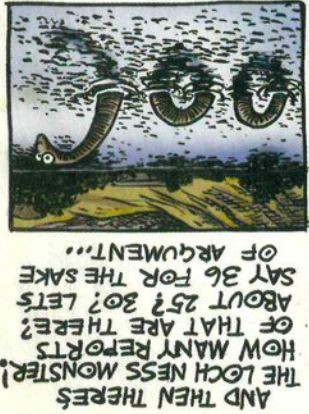
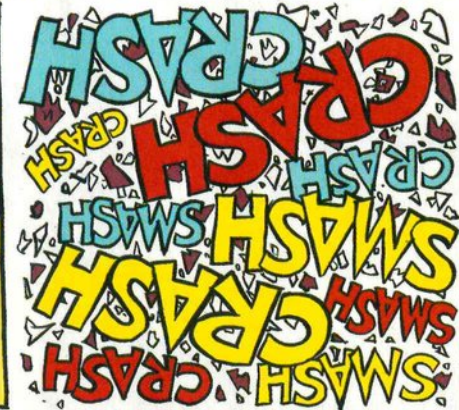
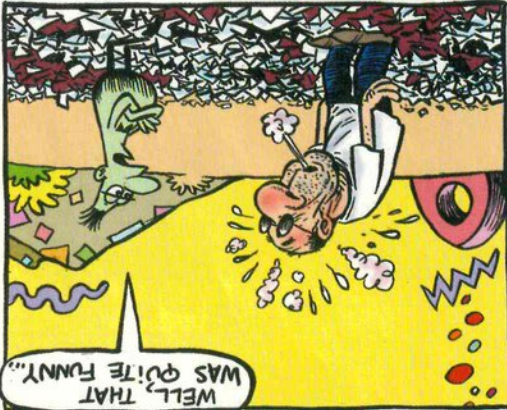
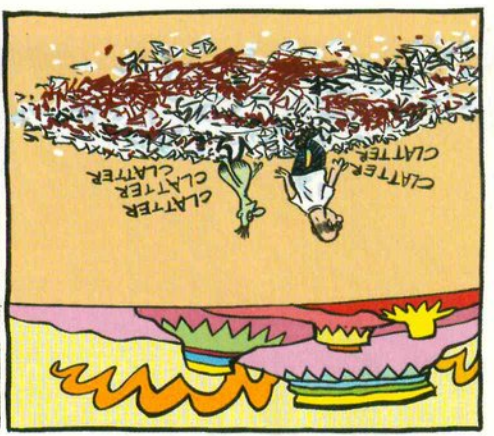
1899 - ENORMOUS KITE-LIKE OBJECT FLASHING RED, WHITE AND BLUE - DORDOGNE, FRANCE

1899 - LUZARCHES, FRANCE - ROUND LUMINOUS OBJECT THAT MOVED AWAY AND DIMINISHED TO A POINT...

1899 - EL PASO, TEXAS - A LUMINOUS OBJECT THAT TRAVELLED WITH THE MOON...

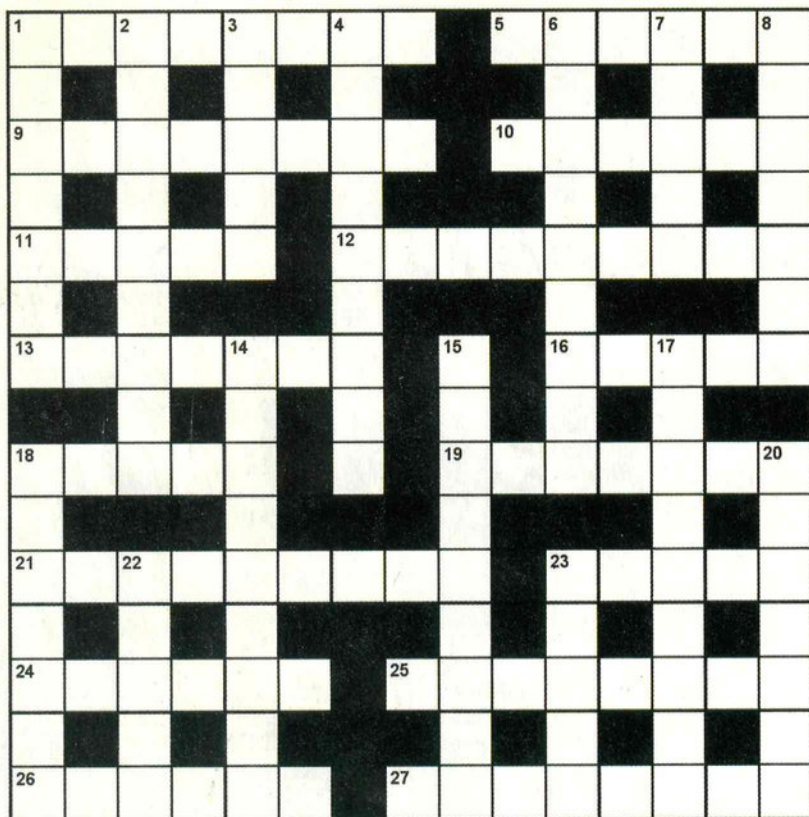
NOT DOING VERY WELL, ARE YOU?...





FORTEAN TIMES CROSSWORD 01

A 70cl bottle of 68 per cent proof La Fée Absinthe will be awarded to the sender of the first correct solution drawn from the hat on 1 September 2005. Answers to: Fortean Times Crossword 01, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland St, London W1T 4JD. Photocopies are accept-



ACROSS

- 1 Monk devastated. Nice to be in cinematic hell? (8)
 5 Spy tortured before the fight finds mental conflict (6)
 9 A noisy preaching over blue royal is very odd (8)
 10 A Tasmanian tiger is dormant. Get your head down, quickly! (6)
 11 Puzzles over the alphabet. I am on top of solution (5)
 12 Speak well of ancient with uranium ecstasy in a frenzy (9)
 13 8 victim (7)
 16 Amongst goblin dust you find a southern constellation (5)
 18 It happens that mathematical diagram cannot be finished when swallowed by visitor from another world (5)
 19 Uninterested Bundy says you will get what is coming to you! (7)
 21 Devil's Tower for example erupts to transform into bad character (9)
 23 8 victim (5)
 24 Shortly returns from swamp with the features of a lycanthrope (6)
 25 Ace damaged over blood carnage. That's the lot (8)
 26 8 victim (6)

27 "Something unfamiliar descends from the air:" Wrote Charles Fort (8)

DOWN

- 1 8 victim (7)
 2 Told Zarathustra their origins, since he arranged to murder god? (9)
 3 Pleas for Regina to enter the hills (5)
 4 Sense teen is mad but in the right state for Bell Witch haunting! (9)
 6 Young prodigy maybe the result of alien breeding (5)
 7 Magician's tool and a first for exorcist (5)
 8 Tears at death notice via sadism (7)
 14 Pharaoh's book belongs to a tomb (2,3,4)
 15 His face rang a bell! Where had I seen him? (5,4)
 17 Temper takes a turn carrying a lot of bad feeling (4-5)
 18 8 victim (7)
 20 Fearing others may refrain from monster's mythical abode (7)
 22 Hearing consecutive musical notes emanating from the sun (5)
 23 Lee Oswald initially backed up cover-up by gutless Lyndon returning following Kennedy's first assassination location? (5)

LA FÉE PARISIAN ABSINTHE

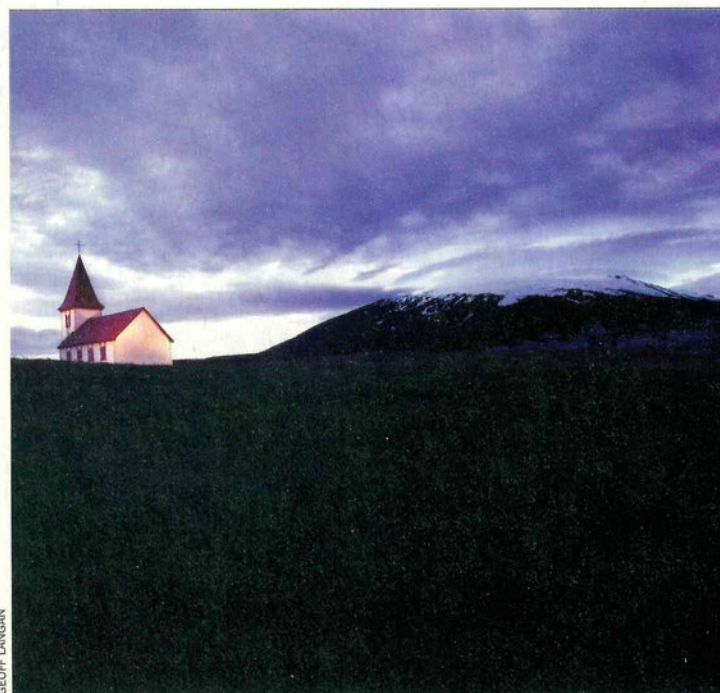
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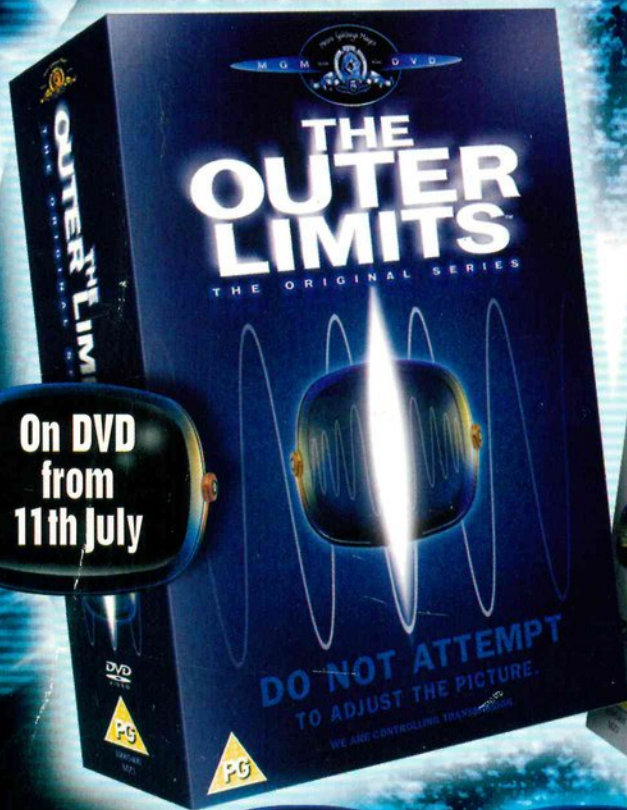
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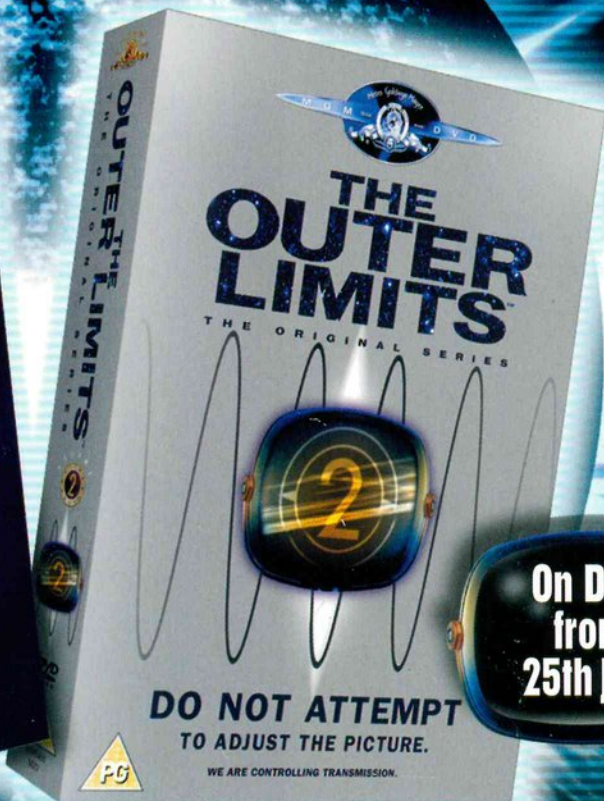
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